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# HER MAJESTY'S MAILS.

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*Rowland Hill*

# HER MAJESTY'S MAILS:

A  
HISTORY OF THE POST-OFFICE,

AND AN

INDUSTRIAL ACCOUNT OF ITS PRESENT CONDITION.

BY

WILLIAM LEWINS,

OF THE GENERAL POST-OFFICE.

---

SECOND EDITION, REVISED, CORRECTED, AND ENLARGED.

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LONDON:

SAMPSON LOW, SON, AND MARSTON,

MILTON HOUSE, LUDGATE HILL.

1865.



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24

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE  
HENRY, LORD BROUGHAM AND VAUX  
ETC. ETC. ETC.

WHO  
DURING AN UNUSUALLY LONG AND LABORIOUS LIFE  
HAS EVER BEEN  
THE EARNEST ELOQUENT AND SUCCESSFUL ADVOCATE  
OF ALL KINDS  
OF SOCIAL PROGRESS AND INTELLECTUAL ADVANCEMENT  
AND WHO FROM THE FIRST GAVE HIS MOST STRENUOUS  
AND INVALUABLE ASSISTANCE IN PARLIAMENT  
TOWARDS CARRYING THE MEASURE OF PENNY POSTAGE REFORM

*This Work*

IS BY PERMISSION DEDICATED  
WITH FEELINGS OF DEEP ADMIRATION RESPECT  
AND GRATITUDE  
BY

THE AUTHOR



## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

---

THE general interest taken in this work on its first appearance, and the favourable reception accorded to it, has abundantly proved that many agreed with me in thinking that, in spite of the world of books issuing from the press, there were still great gaps in the "literature of social history," and that to some extent my present venture was calculated to fill one of them. That my critics have been most indulgent I have had more and more reason to know as I have gone on with the revision of the book. To make it less unworthy of the kind treatment it received, I have taken this opportunity to re-write the principal part of it, and to go over with extreme care and fidelity the remaining portion. In addition to the ordinary sources of information, of which I have made diligent and conscientious use, I have been privileged to peruse the old records of the Post-office, still carefully kept at St. Martin's-le-Grand. To any one knowing the nature of these records, it is almost unnecessary to say that no materials could possibly be more useful in correcting and elucidating — if not even in enlivening — the present volume. I would, therefore, take this opportunity of presenting my cordial thanks to the Secretary of the Post-office, who, through the kind intervention of F. I. Scudamore, Esq. allowed me to see these records, and gave me facilities for their perusal. In addition, however, I have received much valuable assistance from many gentlemen more or less connected with the Post-office, all of whom have, with a heartiness and readiness which I could not have credited had I not experienced it, answered every inquiry which I found it necessary or desirable to make. Much of this service is adverted to, and, I hope,

properly acknowledged in different parts of the body of this work, but my special acknowledgments are due, and are hereby offered, to Sir Rowland Hill, who, when in a state of health which must have rendered this service irksome, most kindly pointed out to me several inaccuracies into which I had fallen, and directed me to many sources of information which had been heretofore either unknown to me or unavailable; to Edward J. Page, Esq. my immediate official superior, whose assistance and kindness in many ways deserve my heartiest thanks; to Ormond Hill, Esq. the Assistant-Controller of the Stamp-office, Somerset House, whose special services I have mentioned in the chapter on Postage-stamps; to Mr. J. Powell Williams, of the General Post-office, who has supplied me with much useful and interesting information; and to many other gentlemen connected with the General Post-offices of London and Edinburgh, who, though they may have done less than those named above, have assisted me with great promptness and willingness.

It is most necessary that I should add, in view of the fact of so many official gentlemen having, in their private capacity, looked upon my effort with favour, that I am alone responsible for the correctness of the subject-matter of this book, and for every expression of opinion into which I may have been led. Nor is the work now, any more than in its first form, in any sense an authorized publication. Nor has any suggestion, even the most remote, ever been made to me by those in authority either to omit, alter, modify, or insert a word which I have written. On the contrary, I have been most completely unfettered and unrestrained in everything I have said. I offer this disclaimer not to those who know anything of the Post-office service; to these readers such an assurance will of course be unnecessary and seem manifestly absurd; but to those of my critics who, otherwise kind, have erroneously concluded that I have been compelled to view my subject through a strictly official medium, and supposed that the writing of this book, which has been the delight of my leisure hours, has formed a portion of my official duty.

W. L.

*May 2d, 1865.*

## PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION.

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THIS volume is the first of a contemplated series designed to furnish some account of the history and ordinary working of the three revenue departments of the country—to do for the great *Governmental* industries what Mr. Smiles has so ably done (to compare his great things with our small) for the profession of civil engineering and several *national* industries. Few attempts have ever been made to trace the rise and progress of the invaluable institution of the Post-office. We have more than once seen the question asked in *Notes and Queries*—that *sine quâ non* of the curious and the learned—where a continuous account might be found of English postal history. In each case, the inquirer has been referred to a short summary of the history of the Post-office, prefixed to the Postmaster-General's *First Report*. Subsequently, Mr. Edward Edwards, in the eighth edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, has supplied an excellent and more extended notice. Still more recently, however, in an admirable paper on the Post-office in *Fraser's Magazine*, Mr. Matthew D. Hill has expressed his astonishment that so little study has been given to the subject—that it “has attracted the attention of so small a number of students, and of each, as it would appear, for so short a time.” “I have not been able to find,” adds Mr. Hill, “that even Germany has produced a single work which affects to furnish more than a sketch or outline of postal history.” The first part of the following pages is offered as a *contribution* to the study of the subject, in the hope that it will be allowed to fill the vacant place, at any rate, until the

work is done more worthily. With regard to that most interesting episode in the history of the Post-office which resulted in the penny-post reform, the materials for our work—scanty though they undoubtedly are in the earlier periods—are here sufficiently abundant, and have engaged our special attention.

The greater portion of the second division of this volume, as well as a small portion of the first part, appeared originally in the pages of several popular serial publications—principally *Chambers's Journal* and Mr. Chambers's *Book of Days*; the whole, however, has been thoroughly revised, where it has not been re-written, and otherwise adapted to the purposes of the present work. We are indebted to Mr. Robert Chambers, LL.D. not only for permitting the republication of these papers in this form, but also for kindly indicating to us sources of information from the rich storehouse of his experience, which we have found very useful. On collateral subjects, such as roads and conveyances, besides having, in common with other readers, the benefit of Mr. Smiles's valuable researches in his *Lives of the Engineers*, we are personally indebted to him for kindly advice. We have only to add that, while in no sense an authorized publication, personal acquaintance has been brought to bear on the treatment of different parts of it, and that we have received, in describing the various branches of the Post-office, much valuable information and assistance from Mr. J. Bowker, of the Railway Post-office, and several gentlemen connected with the London Establishment. It is hoped that the information, now for the first time brought together, may prove interesting to many letter-writers who are ignorant, though not willingly so, of the channels through which their correspondence flows. If our readers think that the Wise Man was right when he likened the receipt of pleasant intelligence from a far country to cold water given to a thirsty soul, surely they will also admit that the *agency* employed to compass this good service, which has made its influence felt in every social circle, and which has brought manifold blessings in its train, deserves some passing thought and attention.

*April 16th, 1864.*

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PART I.

THE

HISTORY OF THE BRITISH POST OFFICE.

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"THE history of the POST OFFICE is a history of national and international benefactions."—*Ency. Brit.*

"THE POST OFFICE giveth wings to the extension of commerce."—PENNANT.

"Of all inventions, the alphabet and the printing-press alone excepted, those inventions which abridge distance have done most for the civilization of our species. . . . Every improvement of the means of locomotion benefits mankind, morally and intellectually, as well as materially."—LORD MACAULAY.





# HER MAJESTY'S MAILS.

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## INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER.

### ON EARLY POSTAL COMMUNICATIONS.

It is very remarkable that the *first* letter of which we have any record should have afforded a conclusive proof of one of the two heinous sins of its writer—"the sweet singer of Israel;" and not only so, but that the messenger employed to convey this particular letter should have carried his own death-warrant. When Uriah the Hittite stood in the way of the gratification of David's unlawful lust, the king "wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hands of Uriah," telling the commander of his hosts to put the bearer of the letter "in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten and die." It is further noteworthy that this letter, from the peculiar character of its contents, must have been a sealed or otherwise secured communication.

Circular letters, and a kind of post for conveying them, are frequently mentioned both in sacred and profane history. Queen Jezebel wrote the first circular letters of which we have any account; and it is not surprising to find that she issued them for purposes of deception. According to the sacred chronicler, she "wrote letters in Ahab's name, and sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters unto the elders and to the

nobles in the city." Still later, or about 900 B.C. Naaman, captain of the host of the King of Syria, was the bearer of a letter from his master to the King of Israel; and though in every way a peaceful enough letter, the latter would seem to have regarded it as a portent of war (2 Kings v. 6, 7). In the days of Hezekiah, or 700 B.C. there must have been some organization for the carrying of the government letters, for we read in the Chronicles of the Kings that "the *posts* went with the letters from the king and his princes throughout all Israel;" while in the Book of Esther we learn that Ahasuerus, King of Persia, being displeased at the disobedience of his wife Vashti, sent letters into every province of his vast empire, informing his subjects that it was his imperial will that "every man should bear rule in his own house."

Though it is not clear by what means Ahasuerus sent those letters-missive into every province of his empire, "according to the writing thereof, and to every people according to their language," yet there can be no doubt that we are indebted to the Persians for the first idea of posts. Diodorus Siculus describes a kind of station built at short distances, in Persia, before the time of Cyrus, in which were placed messengers who were employed solely in giving "notices of public occurrences from one to another with a very loud and shrill voice; by which means news was transmitted to court with great expedition." No secrecy could be observed, however, in this arrangement. Secret intelligence must have been transmitted in some other way. We have, in fact, many accounts of the curious expedients resorted to by the ancients when private and confidential messages required to be forwarded from one place to another. Herodotus tells us that one of the most curious was to shave the head of a trusty messenger, and then to impress the secret intelligence upon the skull. "When the hair had grown sufficiently long for concealment, the messenger proceeded to his destination," where, according to this barbarous arrangement, his head was again shaved, and the object of the secret mission thus revealed. Ovid tells of messages being inscribed upon a person's back. The Jewish historian, Josephus, relates that during some wars messages were conveyed by men disguised as animals; also that letters were frequently sent enclosed in coffins, in company with

an embalmed body. Appian mentions letters inscribed on leaden bullets, and thrown by a sling into a besieged city or camp. Julius Cæsar, when he wished to write secretly, arranged a kind of cypher writing not very dissimilar to that of more modern days. Suetonius and Diodorus Siculus both explain that he made use of the fourth letter after that which he ought to have used; as *d* for *a*, *e* for *b*, &c. According to the same authorities, Augustus used the letter immediately following, as *b* for *a*, *aa* for *z*, &c.

Cyrus was the first to organize a regular riding post, to remedy the great inconvenience felt from the system then in existence in Persia. With this view, he "caused it to be tried how far a horse could go in a day without baiting, and, at that distance, appointed stages and men whose business it was to have horses always in readiness."<sup>1</sup> It is further added that the stations or towers between these longer distances were taken down, as having been superseded. Another authority<sup>2</sup> tells us that there were one hundred and eleven postal stages, a day's journey distant from each other, between Susa and the Ægean Sea, and that at each stage a large and beautiful structure was erected, and every convenience for the purpose designed. The speed of the couriers on the main line of road from Susa to Sardis, which Herodotus says "nothing mortal surpassed," appears to have been from sixty to one hundred and twenty miles a day. "Nothing in the world," he adds, "is borne so swiftly as messages by the Persian couriers." One of his commentators, however, excepts the carrier pigeon from this statement, and very properly so.

It is certainly remarkable that neither in this nor in any other recorded instance have the posts in ancient times developed into one for the conveyance of private correspondence. It is certain that the Greeks and Romans, even when at the height of their civilization, had no regular public post. Among the Greeks, private correspondence was exceedingly rare, and can scarcely be said to have existed before 600 B.C. Whether writing at all was known in the Homeric times is uncertain.<sup>3</sup> (Grote, vol. ii.

<sup>1</sup> Xenophon, viii. p. 496, *edit. Hutchinson.*

<sup>2</sup> Herodotus, viii. 98.

<sup>3</sup> The epistle carried by Bellerophon, as described by Homer in the sixth book of the *Iliad*, kindly pointed out to us by one of the greatest of our Homeric scholars, would seem to indicate with its "sealed tablets," some

p. 192.) We know that subsequently the despatches relating to the affairs of state were forwarded by special messengers or runners, some of whom were celebrated for their speed and powers of endurance. It is related that one of these, Phidippides, ran from Athens to Sparta—or 150 English miles—in two days. But this correspondence was carried on by a very select few. Mr. Grote holds that the Spartans, at any rate, were almost entirely ignorant of written communication. He quotes<sup>1</sup> from Isocrates, who tells us that the most rational Spartans “will appreciate a discourse, if they find any one to read it to them.” Col. Mure,<sup>2</sup> another eminent authority, argues that writing was familiar in the time of Archilochus, both at Sparta and elsewhere in Greece; and quotes from this poet where knowledge of written communications. The reader of the following extract can scarcely fail to be reminded of the first sentence of the present chapter, in which we speak of the first *letter* on record:—

“Bellerophon,  
Who o’er the sons of men in beauty shined,  
Loved for that valour which preserves mankind.  
Then mighty Prætus Argos’ sceptre sway’d,  
Whose hard commands Bellerophon obey’d.  
With direful jealousy the monarch raged,  
And the brave prince in numerous toils engaged.  
For him Antæa burn’d with lawless flame,  
And strove to tempt him from the path of fame:  
In vain she tempted the relentless youth  
Endued with wisdom, sacred fear, and truth.  
Fired at his scorn the queen to Prætus fled,  
And begged revenge for her insulted bed:  
Incensed he heard, resolving on his fate;  
But hospitable laws restrained his hate:  
To Lycia the devoted youth he sent  
*With tablets sealed, that told his dire intent.*  
Now blessed by every power who guards the good,  
The chief arrived at Xanthus’ silver flood:  
There Lycia’s monarch paid him honours due,  
Nine days he feasted, and nine bulls he slew,  
But when the tenth bright morning orient glow’d  
The faithful youth his monarch’s mandate show’d,  
The fatal tablets, till that instant seal’d,  
The deathful secret to the king revealed.”

Bellerophon must now fight for dear life. He slaughters the “chimæra dire” —“a mingled monster of no human kind;” then the Solymæan crew, “fiercest of men;” then the whole force of the Amazons is defied and conquered. After successfully resisting a treacherous ambush of his “Lycian foes,” he is confessed “a god-descended chief,” and remains in Lycia, the king giving him his daughter in marriage, “with half the honours of his ample reign.”—Pope’s *Homer*, vol. i. pp. 217, 218.

<sup>1</sup> Grote’s *History of Greece*, vol. ii. p. 526.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. iii. p. 453.



he likens himself or his ode to a *scytalé* containing unwelcome intelligence. The word "*scytalé*" is explained by Col. Mure as having reference to the practice of writing upon a long narrow strip of parchment, rolled up in a spiral form round a staff, one fold close upon another ; which practice was employed, he says, by the Spartan government for sending despatches to their general on foreign service, who had a staff of precisely similar dimensions, and on receiving the parchment rolled it round his own staff for the purpose of reading it. It must be understood here, for Col. Mure's account is not clear, that the words were written on the strip along the staff, and were quite unintelligible when the strip was unwrapped and not rolled round the counter-part staff. The general, by these means, could alone decipher the message. Mr. Grote, on the contrary, thinks that this staff answered no other purpose than to ensure the herald respect or his own inviolability of person in the performance of his duty. The heralds employed by government, he suggests, were "messengers, not postmen," and their office was to deliver messages, not letters ; the Homeric Talthybius and Idæus, with their successors in office, are "the messengers of Zeus and of men." It is true that the herald might carry parchments ; but this, thinks Mr. Grote, was neither his primitive nor his ordinary function. "*Idæus* was a minister of the voice and the ear."

It is at least curious that the ancient Romans, who seem to have been well acquainted with the art of letter-writing, should have been behind the Greeks, who knew little of it, in the establishment of posts and couriers. We find from Suetonius<sup>1</sup> and Plutarch that it was to the Emperor Augustus that Rome owed the introduction of public couriers. Before his time great attention had been paid to the construction of roads ; some of their great highways—which remain to the present day—attest their skill and labour in this direction. Pliny informs us, that so important was the question of good roads, that "the charge of the public ways was intrusted only to men of the highest dignity." One of the emperors himself undertook the charge of the roads immediately round Rome, and appointed two men of Prætorian rank to pave them.<sup>2</sup> Along the roads were inns or

<sup>1</sup> Suet. *Aug.* 49.

<sup>2</sup> Adam's *Roman Antiquities*, edit. Major, p. 511. 1835.



stages called *Mansiones*; commonly at the distance of half a day's journey. Augustus appointed posts on these principal trunk roads, arranging also places for relays of horses, which were called *Mutationes*.<sup>1</sup> At the latter stages horses were kept, in constant readiness, at the public expense. Pliny<sup>2</sup> distinctly informs us that these posts were employed only to forward the public despatches, or convey political intelligence from or to the government at Rome. Although, however, there was this prohibition against civilians using the government post, there was none against employing *private* messengers upon the public roads, and many of the wealthier citizens of the republic and the empire had their regular messengers. Both public and private couriers were designated *tabellarii*,<sup>3</sup> from *tabella*, a letter. We can well understand how some extraordinary occasion might arise for the speedy transmission of an important private communication to some great distance—an occasion to which the private couriers would scarcely be equal, as they only travelled short journeys without any relay. Hence the dissatisfaction which is said to have arisen in respect to the exclusiveness of the government arrangement. Then arose the granting of the *diploma*, which was issued by the emperor or any Roman magistrate, and by means of which, according to Pliny, any person might command the use of the public horses or carriages, or the services of the public couriers.<sup>4</sup> That the official couriers travelled with wonderful expedition, which far excelled anything of the kind in modern times, scarcely admits of question. Blair,<sup>5</sup> quoting from Quintilian, tells us that Cicero received a letter in Rome on the 28th of September, dated in Britain the first of the same month. "It had been forwarded either through civil letter-carriers, or through a military channel; and considering the passage by sea, and the crossing of the Alps, or a troublesome circuit to avoid the latter, the twenty-six days of

<sup>1</sup> Adams, *Roman Antiquities*, edit. Major, p. 512.

<sup>2</sup> Pliny, Ex. x. p. 120; see also Bergier, and Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, chap. xvii.

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Smith's *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities*.

<sup>4</sup> We have seen it suggested in a respectable journal, with great show of reason, that this *diploma*, which would doubtless have to pass with the letter from the hands of one courier to another throughout the different stages, is a complete prototype of our postage stamps.

<sup>5</sup> Blair's *Inquiry into the State of Slavery among the Romans*.

actual travelling seem wonderfully few" (p. 261). Gibbon<sup>1</sup> relates an instance of early post-travelling, which almost transcends the brightest achievements of our English service even in the palmiest days of mail-coaches. Cæsar, a magistrate of rank, in the time of Theodosius went post from Antioch to Constantinople. He began his journey at night; was in Cappadocia, 165 miles from Antioch, the ensuing evening, and arrived at Constantinople the sixth day about noon, the whole distance being 725 Roman, or 665 English, miles. With such instances before us, and also with the fact that ancient Rome was very familiar with the art of letter writing—as indeed it seems to have been with nearly all the accessories to comfort in their social and domestic existence,—it is only the more marvellous that this great nation, to whom, as well as to others, we are so greatly indebted for much that exalts the intellect and adorns life, should not have left us an example of such a useful institution as a public letter-post. In neglecting the establishment of this institution, however, they neglected an indispensable requisite to social and commercial life and prosperity. The progress of civilization, as it has often been pointed out, has always been intimately and essentially connected with, and dependent upon, facilities for intercommunication—keeping pace, in fact, with the means which nations have possessed for the interchange of persons and property, and with them of thought and knowledge.

Historians who write, and people who talk, of civilization travelling westward, have need to be reminded of the progress which was made in the development of all useful arts, and of the possession of many of the richest germs of civilization by the ancient empires of Mexico and Peru. At any rate, their system of post communication will bear comparison with those of ancient Persia, not to speak of Greece or Rome. When the Spaniards on the strength of their vaunted civilization set themselves to work to subdue these Western barbarians, as they called them, they were astonished to find how superior their travelling and postal arrangements were to any to which they had ever been accustomed. The new world in this respect was then far ahead of the old—a fact which is wonderingly set down and frankly acknowledged by the older Spanish writers.

<sup>1</sup> *Decline and Fall*, vol. i. chap. 2.

"Communications in Mexico, from the earliest times of which any record can be had," says Prescott,<sup>1</sup> "was maintained with the remotest parts of the country by means of couriers, post houses being established for the purpose at two leagues distance from each other." The courier bearing his despatches in the form of a hieroglyphical painting, ran with them to the first station, where he was relieved by another messenger, and so on till the capital was reached. An old chronicler gives the speed at four or five leagues an hour;<sup>2</sup> but it is more likely that another was more accurate when he gave the rate at 150 miles a day. By means of these couriers, fresh fish and other dainties are said to have been served at Montezuma's table from a distance of 150 miles. A curious and novel part of the arrangement of the couriers of the Aztecs was the character of their dress. The colour of the dress worn denoted respectively good or bad tidings, and as they were almost exclusively engaged in carrying intelligence of the movements of the royal army, or some equally important national news, "their appearance spread joy or consternation in the towns or districts through which they passed."

The post system of the Incas was even superior to anything of the kind in Mexico. The remains of gigantic works of art attest their great mechanical and architectural skill. Humboldt<sup>3</sup> tells us that the roads of the Incas were among the most useful and

<sup>1</sup> Prescott's *Mexico*, vol. i. pp. 34, 35.

<sup>2</sup> Some interesting facts of the pedestrian capabilities of man in his savage state are collected by Buffon in his *Natural History*, who assures us that "civilized man knows little of strength or endurance." We need not, however, travel so far for authentic instances of great locomotive power in man. There are many curious accounts extant of the pedestrian powers of the running footmen of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Noblemen and country gentlemen, both in England and Scotland, kept running footmen up to so late as the middle of the last century. Hence, doubtless, the designation "footman." It is related on well authenticated grounds that the Earl of Home, early last century, gave his footman a commission towards the close of the day to proceed from Home Castle in Berwickshire to Edinburgh, a distance of thirty-five miles, in order to deliver a letter of high political importance. Early next morning, when his lordship entered the hall, he saw the man sleeping on a bench, and "was proceeding to some rash act, thinking the man had neglected his duty," when the footman awoke, and gave the earl the answer to his letter. Lord Home, equally astonished and gratified, it is said, with the man's amazing powers of speed, rewarded him with a piece of ground, which bears the name to this day of the *Post Rig*, a term equivalent to the *postman's field*, and the villagers of Home point to the plot as an unquestionable proof of the truth of the story.

<sup>3</sup> *Vues des Cordillères*, p. 294.

stupendous works ever executed by man. Mr. Prescott<sup>1</sup> says that the traveller still meets, especially in central regions of the table land, with memorials of the past. "Among them, perhaps, the most remarkable are the great roads, the broken remains of which are still in sufficient preservation to attest their former magnificence." One of these stupendous works Mr. Prescott goes on to describe as having been "conducted over pathless sierras buried in snow; galleries were cut for leagues through the living rock; rivers were crossed by means of bridges that swung suspended in the air; precipices were scaled by stairways hewn out of the native bed; ravines of hideous depth were filled up with solid masonry; in short, all the difficulties which beset a wild and mountainous region, and which might appal the most courageous engineer of modern times, were encountered and successfully overcome." The length of this particular road the historian estimates at from fifteen hundred to two thousand miles; while the roadway seems to have been so nicely constructed that a carriage might travel upon it as securely as it could on the Appian Way or our own Watling Street. Along the entire route on the principal Peruvian roads, small buildings were erected for the convenience of the post-runners, or *chasquis*, who were stationed at these buildings to carry forward any despatch which might arrive. These despatches were either verbal, or conveyed by means of the *quipus*, an arrangement not very dissimilar to the hieroglyphical scrolls of the Mexicans. The *quipa* "was a cord composed of different coloured threads tightly twisted together, from which a quantity of smaller threads were suspended in the manner of a fringe." The colours denoted different objects, white representing silver; yellow, gold; or as representing abstract ideas, white signified peace and red war. The most important kind of despatches were accompanied by a thread of the crimson fringe which was worn round the temples of the Inca, which thread seems to have been regarded "with the same implicit deference," says Mr. Prescott, "as the signet ring of an Oriental despot." The *chasquis* were dressed in a peculiar livery, intimating their profession. They were well-trained to their employment, and invariably chosen for their speed and fidelity. The rate at which they ran over

<sup>1</sup> *History of the Conquest of Peru*, vol. i. p. 57.

the ground is nowhere mentioned, so far as we can ascertain, but by a system of relays the despatches are said to have been carried at the rate of about 150 miles a day. Montesinos, a Spanish writer, says that, as in Mexico, the royal table was furnished with the choicest dainties by means of the couriers; fish having been known to have been brought a distance of a hundred leagues in twenty-four hours after it was drawn from the ocean! After reading of this marvellous expedition, and the gigantic works which were reared to ensure the high rate of speed, we may well share the wonder of the historian, who, speaking of the postal arrangements of the Mexicans and Peruvians—got up, by the way, without any correspondence with each other—cannot understand “how two barbarian nations of the new world” should have come to the knowledge of such a system “long before it was introduced among the civilized nations of Europe.” It is almost sad to relate that the institution of the Peruvian posts, which appears to have made a deep impression on the Spaniards when they first approached the country, were allowed to fall into complete abeyance during the rule of these so-called civilized conquerors.

It only remains to turn our attention to ancient China before we come nearer home. Marco Polo, the famous Venetian, who travelled in China in the fourteenth century, describes the government post as having been long in existence, and similar to that in use in Persia under Cyrus. “Messengers are sent to divers provinces,” says Polo,<sup>1</sup> “and on all the roads they find a post called *jamb*, at distances of thirty-five miles, for the entertainment of the imperial envoy.” At each *jamb* there was a large edifice, “containing a bed covered with silk, and everything useful and convenient for a traveller;” so that “if even a king should come,” adds Polo, “he would be well accommodated.” Four hundred horses were attached to each station—ten thousand in number—for the convenience of couriers and travellers. “This is the greatest establishment that ever was kept up by any king or emperor in the world; for at these *jamb*s there are maintained altogether more than 200,000 horses.” This reads so much like romance, that, associating the fact with another, namely, that Polo’s annotators are accustomed to tone down the statistics

<sup>1</sup> *Travels of Marco Polo*, 1844 edit. pp. 139, 140.

of the quaint Venetian traveller, we may imagine a lesser number, and still conclude that the "establishment" was a most gigantic undertaking. The Chinese posts appear to have been kept up principally in the less populated districts, and for the carrying of news over long distances. In other parts of the country, and in some cases in the intervals between the more aspiring post-stations, we find foot-runners also employed in carrying despatches. They used to wear a large girdle set round with bells, which were heard at a great distance. When one of these runners received a letter or packet, he would at once set off, and run to the next village, where, his approach being announced by his bells, another would make himself ready for the next stage; and thus, without a break, would the packet be conveyed, "the Khan receiving news in one day and night from places distant a ten days' journey." When the messengers rode with despatches of greater importance, and used the *jambis*, we find that they travelled day and night, accomplishing a distance of 250 or 300 miles in twenty-four hours. Polo's account of the way the business was accomplished seems to be quite trustworthy, as subsequent travellers<sup>1</sup> have described the posts—which excited their greatest admiration—in much the same manner. The whole of these facts afford a curious commentary on the progress of civilization in the Celestial Empire: though this gigantic and elaborate establishment has been in existence from a very early period up to the present century, it is only within the last few years that provision has been made in China for public letter-posts; and even this change was not inaugurated by the Government, but by private enterprise.

The earliest date in modern European history at which any postal service is mentioned, is the year 807, when an organization was planned by the Emperor Charlemagne. Having reduced Italy, Germany, and a part of Spain to his rule, the Emperor of the Franks found it necessary to have some kind of communication with his new dominions. Hence the institution of government couriers and posts which brought him news of occurrences happening at distant places with great expedition. The service, however, did not long survive him; his successors lost the benefits of the posts even quicker than they sacrificed the immense

<sup>1</sup> See Anderson's *British Embassy* (London, 1796), p. 282.

territories which he added to his crown. We hear no more of posts in France till 1464, when, by an *ordonnance* of June 19th in that year, the restless and ambitious Louis XI. re-established them, in order that he "might be the easier advertised of all that passed in his own and neighbouring states." Louis XI. is said to have employed 230 couriers to deliver his letters and despatches. It was not till the seventeenth century that the posts thus originated became public posts.

The first regular European letter-post was established in the republic of the Hanse Towns in the early part of the thirteenth century. These small republics, detached as they were from each other, yet all alike engaged in commercial pursuits, would of necessity require frequent intercommunication ; while, as one writer remarks, the merchants themselves being the rulers, nothing can be more natural, on the one hand, than that the government should allow the benefits of the new order of things to be shared by the entire community, or on the other hand that they should fail to observe the fiscal advantages derivable from letter postage. The example set by the thriving Hanse Towns was not followed in Germany proper till two centuries afterwards, when Maximilian I. caused a line of posts to be laid down in the Tyrol, connecting his newly-acquired Lombardian territories with Austria. Roger, the first count of the House of Thurn and Taxis, originally a member of one of the princely families of Lombardy, is credited with the merit of applying the institution of the post to this locality. In 1516 the next count of the same House formed a line of post communication between Vienna and Brussels, thus further connecting the vast dominions of the Spanish emperor. We next find that the successor of Maximilian, the famous Emperor Charles V. gave Leonhard, Count of Thurn and Taxis, a commission to establish one more line of posts between the Netherlands and Italy, going through Treves, Spires, &c. to Wurtemberg and the Tyrol, and on the successful carrying out of the scheme in 1543, creating the count *Oberpostmeister* of the German empire. For the next fifty years, after the death of Charles V. the posts which he had established fell into disuse, principally because they fell into debt and into the hands of enemies ; but they were again restored under the Emperor Rudolf II. Then disputes arose between the different

states of the empire,—Saxony, the Palatinate, Wurtemberg, and other states electing to serve themselves with their own posts. To settle in some part these disputes, the Emperor Matthias, in 1616 (according to Horneck) created the Count of Taxis a baron of the empire, transferring at the same time “the imperial posts in fee upon himself and heirs,” in virtue of which his descendants have always held peculiar rights and privileges. Austria, Prussia, Bavaria, Hanover, Baden, and the refractory states above alluded to have in late years either purchased exemption from the arrangement, or compulsorily freed themselves from it, but the family possesses to this day, as a fief of the empire, the postal system of Nassau, Saxe Weimar, Schwarzburg, Rudolstadt, &c. The posts of the free cities of Germany, also, in most part belong to the House, the head quarters of which have been, since 1811, at Frankfort-on-the-Maine.



## CHAPTER II.

OUR POST COMMUNICATIONS PRIOR TO THE ESTABLISHMENT  
OF THE POST OFFICE.

WE may gather from different historical notices and parliamentary papers something like a continuous account of the early history of the British Post Office, tracing its progress from the fifteenth century to the present time. We look in vain, however, for the same distinctness in the details prior to that period, and can do little more than guess as to how our forefathers then got on in the matter of their correspondence. We have searched, in fact, through entire and laboured tomes of history, without coming across even the barest mention of such subjects. It is true that it is only within a comparatively recent period that the Post Office institution has risen to a position of great national importance. From this position it would now be impossible to exclude it in any subsequent national records: that kind of writing which should neglect to recite the means employed by nations to compass their advancement, step by step, would scarcely now be dignified with the name of history. It is because it has been vastly different in past times that we have now to lament over the meagreness of our information on this, and similar subjects. "History," says an able writer in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "more attentive to record the transactions of monarchs than the steps by which communities improve their conveniences, furnishes little beyond an incidental notice of the modes by which the circulation of correspondence was effected before it became matter of state regulation." Such subjects were probably cast aside as furnishing nothing but a mass of uninteresting detail. Distinguished annalists of our own day have thought differently, however, and the brilliant pages of Macaulay and Froude are even enlivened by the introduction of facts showing the gradual advance made in our social and

domestic improvements. It is to such materials as we have, rendered scanty by the neglect of our earlier historians, that we must now turn.

It is almost impossible to tell whether any organization existed in Britain under the Romans for the delivery of despatches ; or even whether the system in vogue at Rome was ever brought to this country. Wherever the conquerors went they certainly made transmission between different parts of the country comparatively easy and safe. The remains of the roads constructed by the Romans bear witness to the pains which they took in this direction. But here our researches end. Of the Anglo-Saxon era the information left us is equally bare and scanty. Sharon Turner, Palgrave, and Kemble are all nearly silent on this subject. The Anglo-Saxon kings would seem to have done something to keep up the roads which the Romans made with such skill ; and in the practice of travelling from place to place they seem to have done more than their descendants of several centuries afterwards. Not only in the towns, but on the high roads the people had their taverns, or *guest-houses*, as they were called. "The word *inn*," says Mr. Wright,<sup>1</sup> "is itself Saxon, and signified a lodging." A traveller in Bede arrives at a *hospitium* in the north of England, "kept by a *paterfamilias* and his household." The travellers, it ought to be said, were mostly wandering minstrels and "merchants"—answering to our pedlars ; and they were always welcome, for they brought the only news ever received from distant places. It is more than likely that the hospitable laws of the period had something to do with the heartiness of their welcome. Mr. Wright tells us that when a stranger presented himself at a Saxon door and asked for board and lodging, the man who refused was looked upon with contempt by his countrymen. The venerable Bede describes as the first act of the "custom of hospitality," the washing of the stranger's hands and feet ; afterwards he would be allowed to remain two nights without being questioned. A refusal to give this accommodation was considered worthy of ecclesiastical censure. Merchant travellers went in small parties for defence as well as companionship, and as the laws of hospitality did not

<sup>1</sup> *History of Domestic Manners and Sentiments in England during the Middle Ages*, p. 75.

relate so much to them, they carried their tents with them in much the same way as the pedlars and gipsies of our own day. Messengers employed to carry news and letters between the different kings of the Heptarchy walked at a swift rate with them. Little difference is recorded in this respect, and in other of the domestic manners of the nation under the Norman kings, if we except the change in travelling and the greater speed of the messengers brought about by a more extensive use of horses.

While the general post dates from the time of the Stuarts, the establishment of a regular *riding post* in England owes its origin to Edward IV. As the establishment of this post in England is almost contemporaneous with that of the French king, Louis XI., it cannot be said that England, even at this period, was much behind her continental neighbours in the production of measures of social progress. The English post, moreover, seems from the first to have been fully commensurate with the demands for its service, its growth also depending on the gradual advancement made in the country. Five or six centuries ago few private persons could either read or write. On the other hand, the business of the State demanded correspondence. The king had his barons to summon, or his sheriffs to instruct, and letters of writ were issued accordingly—a few Government messengers supplying all the wants of the time. Now and then the nobles would require to address each other, and sometimes to correspond with their dependents; but, as a general rule, neither the serf nor his master had the power, even if they had the will, to engage much in writing. As time wore on, and we come nearer the age of the Tudors, the desire for learning spread, though still the few who engaged in literary or scientific pursuits were either attached to the court or to the monastic establishments, of which we had then a fair share. Even when the Tudor dynasty came in, trade with foreign countries and remote districts in our own country was to a great extent unknown. Each district dwelt alone, supplied its own wants, and evinced very little desire for any closer communication. Whilst we can thus account for the paucity of correspondence among the people, the different stages of progress which the transmission of the royal letters underwent in England testify to their increasing number, and must not go unnoticed.

In the earliest times in England, and prior to the first regular horse-posts, both public and private letters were sent by private messengers, travelling when required. In the reign of Henry I. messengers were first permanently employed by the king. So early as the reign of King John the payments to *nuncii*—as these messengers were now called—for the conveyance of Government despatches, are to be found entered in the *Close* and *Miscæ Rolls*, “and the entries of these payments,” says one writer,<sup>1</sup> “may be traced in an almost unbroken series through the records of many subsequent reigns.” Nuncii were also attached to the establishments of the principal nobles of the time, and communications passed between them by means of these functionaries. In the reign of Henry III. the son and successor of King John, these messengers began to wear the royal livery. At first it was necessary for them to keep horses of their own, or use those belonging to the royal or baronial mansion. In the reign of Edward I. we find that fixed stations or *posts* were established, at which places horses were kept for hire ; the nuncii ceasing to provide horses of their own, or to borrow from private individuals. Several letters are in existence dating as far back as the reign of Edward II. which bear the appearance of having been carried by the nuncii of that period, with “*Haste, post haste !*” written on the backs of them. We may notice here, in passing, that afterwards such words were not understood as of idle intent, but were regarded as indications of the importance of the communication, some of the superscriptions being as energetic as words could make them. Thus, in the reign of Edward VI. we find the Lord Protector (Somerset) writing to Lord Dacre in Cumberland anent the Border troubles, which were becoming serious again, and concerning which delay could not be suffered. Somerset’s letter to Dacre is thus endorsed, “To our very good lord, the Lord Dacre, Warden of the West Marches, in haste ; haste, post haste, for thy life, for thy life, for thy life.” Lord Dacre’s reply to the Duke of Somerset is endorsed, “To my Lord Protector’s Grace, in haste ; haste, post haste, for thy life, for thy life, haste, haste.”<sup>2</sup> Both

<sup>1</sup> *Ency. Brit.* 8th edit.

<sup>2</sup> Nicholson and Burns, *History and Antiquities of Cumberland and Westmoreland*, vol. i. p. 62.

these letters seem to have taken five days for the journey between London and Carlisle.

With the machinery, to a great extent, ready to his hand, the improvements contrived by Edward IV. were easily accomplished. In 1481, this monarch was engaged in war with Scotland, when, according to Gale, in order to facilitate the transmission of news from the English capital, he ordered a continuous system of posts, consisting of relays of horses and messengers every twenty miles. By this arrangement, despatches were conveyed to him at his camp with increased expedition, though, as different writers give different accounts of the speed at which the couriers travelled, it is not easy to determine the exact increase in the rate. It is nevertheless certain, that a considerable improvement took place, although, by the way, Edward IV. seems to have had no great desire to benefit either his age or posterity in the matter. "The natural indolence and love of pleasure of the king led to the establishment of one of the most useful and beneficial institutions of civilized life;"<sup>1</sup> and it really seems that Edward was more anxious that his brother, the Duke of Gloucester, should be able to amuse him speedily with records of intrigues, than that his *posts* should subserve any national purpose. The couriers travelled at the rate of a hundred miles a day. When peace was restored, and Edward returned to his court, the relays fell into disuse, only to be revived by his successors in cases of extreme urgency. Little improvement in communication could be expected under such a course of procedure, and little was effected.

Henry VIII. was the first monarch who endeavoured to keep the posts in a state of efficiency, and, who, with the energy and wisdom for which he was so remarkable in matters relating to the advancement of the nation, sought to improve their organization in peace as well as war. It is still noticeable, however, that the post stages were kept up, primarily, as a convenience to the Government for the conveyance of its despatches. Henry VIII. instituted the office of "Master of the Postes," with the entire control of the service. During the king's lifetime the office was filled by one Brian Tuke, afterwards

<sup>1</sup> *Extracts from Contemporary Documents and Letters relating to the last Ten Years of Edward the Fourth, A.D. 1473—1483.* London, 1845.

Sir Brian. We gain some insight into the duties of the office, and also into the manner in which the work is done, from the following letter (found in the voluminous correspondence of Thomas Cromwell) from the "Master of the Postes," at an early period of his superintendence, no doubt in exculpation of himself and his arrangements, which seem to have been in some way called in question by the Lord Privy Seal. "The King's Grace hath no more ordinary posts, nor for many days hath had, but between London and Calais. For, sir, you know well, that except the hackney horses between Gravesend and Dover, there is no such usual conveyance in post for men in this realm as in the accustomed places in France and other *parties*; for," adds Tuke, with delightful *naïveté*, "no man can keep horses in readiness *without some way to bear the charges*; but when placards are sent for such cause (*viz.* to order the immediate forwarding of some state packet) the constables many times be fain to take horses out of ploughs and carts, *wherein can be no extreme diligence.*" The king's worthy secretary thus charges the post-master with remissness, and the mails with tardiness, when the facts, as gathered from the above letter, show that the Government had not gone to the trouble and expense of providing proper auxiliaries, as in France; *ergo*, they could not expect the same regularity and despatch. Master Tuke then defends the character of his men:—"As to the posts between London and the court, there be now but two; whereof the *one* is a good robust fellow, and wont to be diligent, evil entreated many times, he and other posts, by the 'herbigeours,' for lack of horse-room or horse-meat, without which diligence cannot be. The other hath been a most painful fellow in night and day that I have known amongst the messengers. If he now *slak* he shall be changed as reason is."

In this reign we find the first mention of the system of travelling post on the horses attached to the department of the "Master of the Postes." When the Government required the horses for a messenger travelling on its service, not carrying letters, the king's Council addressed a letter "to all mayors, sheriffs, constables, and all other of His Majesty's subjects to whom in this case it shall appertain, or to any of them." The following is a copy of a warrant issued in 1541:—

"Forasmuch as the King's Majesty sendeth this bearer, James, one of His Majesty's pursuivants, into those parts by post upon certain of His Majesty's affairs, his pleasure and high commandment is that you see him furnished of post-horses from place to place, both outward and homeward, at reasonable prices, as ye care for His Majesty's pleasure, and as ye will answer for the contrary at your peril."<sup>1</sup>

In the same year, at the meeting of Privy Council, a warrant for payment of money spent in the king's service was made out to Brian Tuke, and called "post money."<sup>2</sup> Again,<sup>3</sup> by an order in Council at Hampton Court, 1542, Sir Brian Tuke is required by a letter either to leave there a sum of money, "for the despatch of post from time to time, as they should be sent forth with the king's letters, or else appoint one to attend here specially for that purpose, for otherwise the King's Highness's affairs should be for lack of money greatly hindered." The position of "Master of the Postes" is, at this early period, one of great anxiety, but associated with no little honour and responsibility. One day we find him accounting for reported delay in his mails in the following manner:—"But, not taking upon me to excuse the posts, I will advertise you that I have known folks, which, for their own thanks, have dated their letters a day or two more before they were written, and the conveyers have had the blame;" another day, and he is assisting in the deliberations of the Privy Council, of which he seems to have been a member by virtue of his office. Sir H. Nicholas<sup>4</sup> gives the name of Sir Brian Tuke amongst other members who, in 1532, signed a letter of congratulation from the Privy Council to the monarch, "on his safe arrival and most goodly passage into your towne of Calais."

During the insurrection in the northern counties in the reign of Henry VIII. the rebel leaders, in order to insure a rapid transmission of orders, established regular horse posts from Hull to York, York to Durham, and Durham to Newcastle.<sup>5</sup>

The Council of Edward VI. finding that a great many irregularities existed in the hire of post-horses, had an Act passed

<sup>1</sup> *Harleian MSS.* No. 283, f. 148.

<sup>2</sup> Nicholas's *Proceedings and Ordinances of the Privy Council of England*, vol. vii. p. 72.

<sup>3</sup> *Ut supra*, p. 133.

<sup>4</sup> *Ut supra*, p. 343.

<sup>5</sup> Froude's *History of England*, vol. iii. p. 185.

### *Posts during Elizabeth's Reign.*

(2 and 3 Edward VI. c. 3), fixing the charge at a penny per mile for all horses so impressed.

The Lords of the Council in Queen Mary's reign made order that all the posts between London and the North "should each of them keep a book, and make entry of every letter that he shall receive, the time of the delivery thereof into his hands, with the parties' names that shall bring it into him."

Up to the end of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, no further important improvements were made, although her Council took steps to make the existing service as efficient as possible, by reforming some abuses which had crept into it during her sister's reign. Before Elizabeth's death the expenses of the post were reduced to rather less than 5,000*l.* per annum. On her accession, the sum charged for conveying Her Majesty's despatches from stage to stage was enormous. Up even to so late as the thirty-first year of her reign, a rate of 20*d.* a letter was levied by the proprietors of post-horses for every stage travelled over. The Council at first resolved to pay the proprietors 3*s.* a day for the service, irrespective of the distance travelled. The payment was reduced to 2*s.* and ultimately to 18*d.* a day. Much interesting and curious information respecting this early service—the different stages, the routes taken by the couriers of the time of Elizabeth, &c. &c.—has been found in old records of the "Master of the Postes," exhumed, some twenty years ago, from the vaults of Somerset House. This functionary, it would appear, paid, as did Sir Brian Tuke, all current expenses appertaining to his department—"the wages and entertainments of the ordinary posts," and he was reimbursed in full under the grant "for the conveyance of Her Highness's letters and her Council's." The information respecting the routes taken is especially interesting, inasmuch as it serves to show that even at this early period arrangements were made with great circumspection, some of these early post routes existing, with but trifling modifications, down to the present century, and to the time of railways. The route from London to Berwick is shown by the list of posts (or stages) laid down between the two places in the fifteenth year of Queen Elizabeth's reign. They run as follows:—1. London; 2. Waltham; 3. Ware; 4. Royston; 5. Caxton; 6. Huntingdon; 7. Stilton;



8. Stamford ; 9. Grantham ; 10. Newark ; 11. Tookesford (Tuxford) ; 12. Foroby (Ferriby) ; 13. Doncaster ; 14. Ferry Bridge ; 15. Wetherby ; 16. Boroughbridge ; 17. Northalerton ; 18. Derneton (Darlington) ; 19. Durham ; 20. Newcastle ; 21. Morpeth ; 22. Hexham ; 23. Haltwistle ; 24. Carlisle ; 25. Alnwick ; 26. Belford ; 27. Berwick. For three centuries, therefore, the High North Road took in all these posts, with the exception of Tuxford. A considerable diversion, it will be noticed, was made at Morpeth towards the west, in order to take in the then important towns of Hexham and Carlisle ; but it is more probable that the direct post-road continued north through Alnwick to Berwick, and that the west road was only a kind of cross-post. There were no less than three post routes to Ireland in this reign, and all of them were used more or less. The first and most important, perhaps, left London and took the following towns in its way ; the distance between each town constituting a "stage ;" viz. Dunstable, Dayntry (Daventry), Collsill (Coleshill), Stone, Chester, and Liverpool, from which latter place a packet sailed. The remaining two mails took slightly different routes to *Holyhead*, whence also a packet sailed for Ireland. We find there were also *two* posts between London and Bristol and the west of England ; the first going by way of Maidenhead, Newbury, Marlborough, and Chippenham ; the other, by Hounslow, Maidenhead, Reading, Marlborough, Maxfield, to Bristol. To Dover there were also *two* posts ; the one passing through Dartford, Gravesend, Rochester, Sittingbourne, Canterbury, Margate, and Sandwich ; the other passing through Canterbury direct, without calling at the two last-named places. The posts above enumerated were called the "ordinary" posts, and may be supposed to have been the permanent arrangements for the transmission of the Government despatches. When these posts did not avail—and it must be understood that they were never allowed to make a *détour* into the cross-roads of the country—"extraordinary posts" were established. Generally speaking, these extra posts were put on for any service which required the greatest possible haste. Here is an extract from the records of which we have spoken, on this point. "Thomas Miller, gent. sent in haste, by special commandment of Sir Francis Walsingham, throughout all the postes

of Kent to warn and to order, both with the posts for an augmentation of the ordinary number of horses for the packet, and with the countries near them for a supply of twenty or thirty horses apiece for the 'throughe posts,' during the service against the Spanish navy by sea, and the continuance of the army by land." Again, in 31st Elizabeth, special or "extraordinary" posts were laid between London and Rye, upon unwelcome news arriving from France, "and for the more speedy advertisement of the same." "Thomas Miller, gent. sent at Easter, 1597, to lay the posts and *likest* landing places either in Kent or Sussex, upon intelligence given of some practices intended against the queen's person." Mr. Miller seems to have judged Rye to be the "likest landing place" for the purpose, and, returning, "received seven pound for his services." Other extraordinary posts were often laid down between Hampton Court and Southampton and Portsmouth, for the "more speedy advertisement" of occurrences from the ports of Normandy and Bretagne.

In the early part of Queen Elizabeth's reign, disputes were frequent with the foreign merchants resident in London with regard to the foreign post which up to this reign they had been allowed to manage among themselves. In 1558, the queen's Council of State issued a proclamation "for the redresse of disorders in postes which conveye and bring to and out of the parts beyond the seas, pacquets of letters." It would seem that soon after the arrival of the Flemings in this country, in the previous century, they established a post-office of their own, between London and the Continent, appointing one of themselves as postmaster, by the sufferance and favour of the reigning sovereign. "Afterwards," says Stow,<sup>1</sup> "by long custom, they pretended a right to appoint a master of the *Strangers' Post*, and that they were in possession of from the year 1514." This continued till 1558, in which year the foreign merchants fell out among themselves over the question of appointing a postmaster. The Flemings, aided by the Spanish ambassador, chose one Raphael Vanden Putte; the Italians, by this time a considerable body of foreigners, chose one of their number for the vacant place. Not being able to agree, the disputants referred their

<sup>1</sup> *Surveye of London*, vol. ii.

case to the English Council, when, to the surprise of the foreigners, their right to appoint at all was publicly disputed. The English merchants took up the matter very warmly, and addressed the Privy Council in two or three petitions. They took the opportunity to complain that the authorities of the foreign post had frequently acted unfairly to them, in keeping back their continental letters, and so giving the foreigners the advantage of the markets. In one of the petitions, they urged, "that it is one of the chief points of the prerogative belonging to all princes, to place within their dominions such officers as were most trusty of their own subjects; that the postmaster's place was one of great trust and credit in every realm, and therefore should be committed to the charge of the natural subjects and not strangers, especially in such places as had daily passages into foreign realms, and where was concourse of strangers." Further, "The strangers were known to have been the occasion of many injuries in the staying and keeping back of letters, and, in the meantime, an extraordinary would be despatched to prevent the markets and *purpose*." The English merchants urged that it would be doing the foreigners no injustice to appoint an English postmaster; no new exactions need be imposed upon them, "and such men might be placed in the office as could talk with them in their own language, and that should make as good promise, and as faithfully perform the same in all equity and upright dealings, as any stranger had done." The result was, that it was finally settled the "Master of the Postes" should have charge both of the English and foreign offices, and that the title of this functionary should be changed to "Chief Postmaster." Thomas Randolph, afterwards Sir Thomas, who was the first to bear the title, was the Randolph whom the queen employed so often on delicate missions and ambassadorial duties to Scotland and the Continent. So much, in fact, was Randolph out of England before he was knighted, that his Post-office place must have been a mere sinecure, and bestowed upon him on account of his more important and very eminent services abroad.<sup>1</sup> "Randolph," wrote Sir William

<sup>1</sup> Some doubt attaches to the person who first held the office of "chief-postmaster." Thomas Randolph, one of the minor poets and dramatic writers of that era, the Randolph of the *Muses' Looking Glass* and *The Jealous Lovers*, lived within the period. Though he enjoyed the friendship of Ben Jonson,

Cecil to Queen Elizabeth out of Scotland, on one occasion when he accompanied that great statesman to make a treaty with the Queen Regent there—"Randolph is worth more than I fear our time will well consider, and no poolar nor robber."<sup>1</sup>

Under the Tudor dynasty, marvellous strides were taken in the social progress of the country. The habits of a great nation can, of course, only change gradually and slowly, but more than a revolution in religion had been worked during the dynasty of the Tudors. In the fifteenth century many social changes had commenced, it is true ; serfdom and villanage still existed in name, but they were fast disappearing as a fact. If we may credit the pictures drawn by Chaucer, and in the curious writings of Piers Ploughman—and of course we may—the barons and country gentry lived in a much more kindly and intimate intercourse with their dependents than they had done at any time subsequent to the Norman invasion. It was the development of trade, however, notwithstanding all this, which really commenced with the Tudors, that gave the grand impulse to the new social era. The increased commerce spread wealth abroad, and wealth brought with it many of the elements of increased social comfort. Thanks in great part to the Lollards, who had done incalculable service for the poor, the more defenceless, the more uneducated portions of this early society, the people began to feel more interest in each other and in the affairs of the world, and in proportion as this feeling grew, the demand for interchange of thought and news became more and more urgent. Under the new order of things the conveyance of letters became a matter of the same vital necessity as the conveyance of goods or persons, and thus the same circumstances which would produce roads, bridges, and hostleries, necessarily led to the establishment of the post. In the reign of Henry VIII. the English people kept up a considerable trade with Flanders in wool. A commercial treaty subsequently gave free ingress and egress to the ships of both nations. The change that this increased trade wrought was immediate and striking. English rural districts

who enrolled him, indeed, among his adopted sons, and who might have obtained him the place, yet it is tolerably certain that the emoluments of the office went to his diplomatic namesake.

<sup>1</sup> Froude's *Reign of Elizabeth* (vol. vii. and viii. of his valuable *History of England*) is full of references to Thomas Randolph.

which had before been self-supporting—growing their own corn and feeding their own cattle—now turned their corn-land into pasture-land, and sought grain among their neighbours. The dissolution of the monasteries under the same monarch had the effect, among other results, of scattering broadcast over the country those who had previously lived together in great seclusion, and who enjoyed almost a monopoly of learning. The Reformation civilized as well as christianized the people. Other causes, perhaps of lesser importance, were at work, which directly operated in opening out the country and encouraging habits of locomotion, and, in this way, the spread of intelligence generally. Among many such were changes, for instance, in the routine of law procedure, introduced by Henry. Up to his time, courts of arbitration had sat from time immemorial within the different baronies of England, where disputes, especially those between landlord and tenant, were cheaply and equitably adjusted. Now such cases were ordered to be taken to London, and country people found themselves compelled to take journeys to London, and sue or be sued at the new courts of Westminster.<sup>1</sup>

Up to this time horses afforded almost the only means of conveyance from place to place, though carriages of a kind now begin to be mentioned in contemporary accounts. The first mention of any kind of conveyance in England was made in the reign of Richard II. The king "being threatened," says Stow, in his *Surveye of London and Westminster*, "by the rebels of Kent, rode from the Tower of London to Mile End, and with him his mother, because she was sick and weak, in a *whirlicote*." Richard de Maidstone has described in Latin verse the grand entry of Richard II. into London, when the ladies of the court rode in two of these carts, for they were nothing else, one of which "*falling over*," says Mr. Wright,<sup>2</sup> "exposed its fair occupants in a not very decorous manner to the jeers of the multitude." The jeering, however, was not the worst consequence, for the untoward event seems to have resulted in the banishment of coaches from the precincts of the court for near two hundred years. Stow tells us that the "luxury of coaches" was re-

<sup>1</sup> Froude's *History of England*, vol. iii. p. 94.

<sup>2</sup> *History of Domestic Manners*, p. 496.

introduced into England in the reign of Queen Mary, when Walter Ripon made a coach for the Earl of Rutland ; and in the year 1564, "the same artist made the first hollow turning coach, with pillars and arches," for Queen Elizabeth. The coach—nothing, in fact, but a cart without springs, covered over by a gorgeous canopy, and a chair or seats fixed in it—was used by the queen on one occasion when she went to open Parliament. Elizabeth would seem to have used it only once, and has left behind her a curious and most graphic account of her sufferings during the journey, in a letter written in the old French of that period to the French ambassador at her court.<sup>1</sup> The wagon, which had been originally contrived for ladies, now that the queen discarded it, was again in disfavour, and banished from London. It seems to have found its way into the provinces, however, the gentry of that time being delighted with it. "On a certain day in 1583," we learn on the authority of Mr. Smiles, "that valyant knyght, Sir Harry Sydney, entered Shrewsbury in his wagon with his trompeter blowynge, verey joyfull to behold and see." Travelling in carriages was much more insecure, as well as difficult, than performing the journey on horseback. We could not well, in fact, exaggerate the difficulties which all kinds of travellers were required to compass at this early period. As yet there were but one or two main roads, and even these were infested by bands of robbers. The *Paston Letters* contain several allusions to the dangers incident to travelling in the country during the century. There seems to have been no safety except when the travellers went in company. Even in the neighbourhood of the metropolis, and certainly in all the more remote districts, the roads are described as having been not unlike broad ditches, much waterworn, and strewn with loose stones. Travellers had thus little choice but to ride on horseback or walk. The sovereign, the judges, and all gentlefolk rode. Women in general—at any rate those who were not skilful horsewomen—rode on pillions behind some relative or serving man. In this way Queen Elizabeth, when she rode into the city, placed herself behind her Lord Chancellor. The side-saddle was in use, it is true, at this early period, but none but the most experienced riders ventured with it.

<sup>1</sup> Smiles' *Lives of the Engineers*, vol. i.

Under all these circumstances, it cannot be wondered at that general intelligence travelled slowly. If we wonder at all, it is how special messengers, travelling with special despatches of consequence, possibly contrived to accomplish some recorded journeys in the short time they did. Among many well authenticated cases of the kind, we may give one from the annals of the reign of Henry VIII. On the 1st of April, 1515, the English envoy in Scotland wrote from Stirling to Henry of England :— “ This Friday, when I came home to dinner, I received your most honourable letters by post, dated at your mansion, Greenwich, 26th March.”<sup>1</sup> The speed at which the royal courier travelled in this case would have seemed almost incredible had we not had good reason for believing that Henry VIII. kept his English couriers in a high state of perfection. Another instance is somewhat better known. Sir Robert Carey rode post with sealed lips from Richmond in Surrey to Edinburgh in less than three days to announce the death of Elizabeth to the Scotch king. This was undoubtedly a great feat for those days, especially as the messenger rested a considerable time on two occasions during the journey. Public and private couriers riding post had other difficulties to contend with than those of bad roads and unequal accommodation—difficulties which throw a curious light over the wants and conditions of the poorer portions of the community. A courier, in approaching a town, would be soon surrounded by crowds of people, urgently asking for news of the districts through which he had passed. At times, he would not be suffered to pass on without furnishing the needed information. About this time a royal courier in a Yorkshire town was maltreated because he would not or could not satisfy the curiosity of a mob which had gathered round him. Fear of such a circumstance has been known to cause the post messenger to make a *detour* of many miles, in order to avoid the gaze and importunity of the commonalty. Few of them ever saw a letter. Pilgrims, as they travelled between the monasteries of the period, or who, after their dissolution, visited their shrines, dispensed news to the poor, and would occasionally

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Lang's *Historical Summary of the Post Office in Scotland*, p. 3. In this and all subsequent cases we have thought it best to give the spelling of early letters and extracts as modernized.

carry letters for the rich.<sup>1</sup> The pilgrim seems to have taken the place of the travelling minstrel of the Saxon and Norman periods. The letters of the period, many of which survive, show that great care was taken to protect them from the curiosity of the bearer; and precautionary measures were resorted to to prevent delay. They were usually most carefully folded, and fastened at the end by a sort of paper strap, upon which the seal was affixed, whilst under the seal a piece of string or silk thread, or perhaps a straw, was frequently placed, running round the letter. The following letter, still extant, brought under the notice of the Post-office authorities by the Bishop of Llandaff,<sup>2</sup> in order, it would seem, to elucidate the Post-office history of the period, will serve here to give the reader an insight into the way letters were then dealt with, as well as the speed at which they were forwarded:—

“ARCHBISHOP PARKER TO SIR W. CECIL.

“Sir,—According to the Queen’s Majesty’s pleasure and your advertisement, you shall receive a form of prayer, which, after you have perused and judged of it, shall be put in print and published immediately, &c.

“From my house at Croydon, this 22d July, 1566, at four of the o’clock, afternoon.

“Your honour’s always,

“MATTHEW CANT.”

The letter is thus endorsed by successive postmasters, according to the then existing custom:—

“Received at Waltham Cross, the 23d of July, at nine at night.

“Received at Ware, the 23d of July, at twelve at night.

“Received at Croxton, the 24th of July, between seven and eight of the morning.”

His Grace’s letter, therefore, which would appear to have been of such importance that one or more messengers were required to travel night and day, in order to deliver it at the earliest possible moment, took forty hours to travel sixty-three miles.

<sup>1</sup> Whittaker’s *History of Craven*, speaking of the close of the sixteenth century. Fol. edit.

<sup>2</sup> *Vide Postmaster-General’s Second Report*, p. 38.



## CHAPTER III.

## THE RISE OF THE GENERAL POST-OFFICE.

It was reserved for the Stuart kings to organize for the first time in England a regular system of post communication, the benefits of which should be shared by all who could find the means. England was behind other European nations in establishing a public letter post. It was not until the foreigners had drawn particular attention to their postal arrangements by their constant disputes, that the English government established a general post for inland letters, similar to the one whose benefits "the strangers" had enjoyed even prior to the reign of Henry VIII. Little progress towards this desirable end was made in the reign of the first James, if we except a better organization for the conveyance of official despatches. At the same time, it is only fair to state that the improved organization here referred to formed the groundwork for the subsequent public post.

One of the results attendant on the accession of the Scotch king to the English crown was the means of calling attention to the inadequate and imperfect arrangement in the system of horse-posts. On the 5th of April, 1603, a few days after the sycophantic Carey had hurried headlong into Scotland to salute him as king, James set out on his journey to the English capital, to take quiet possession of the crown which sat so uneasily on the heads of his descendants. He was treated most royally, as he took the different stages on the great North road, by the Stanhopes, the Shrewsburys, the Harringtons, the Burghleys, and the Sadlers of that day; while it is amusing to note the difficulties which some of his retinue experienced in getting from one mansion to another. Then, immediately on his arrival in London, the high road from Edinburgh to the English capital became thronged night and day with the king's countrymen, who rushed forward in the zeal of a new-born enthusiasm to

congratulate the monarch whom, for "unprinceliness and ungodliness," they had all spurned but a few months before. Not Scotchmen only, but English statesmen and courtiers, "corporations and officialites of every description," are said to have thronged all the post-roads to London, "eager to be shone upon by the new risen sun."<sup>1</sup> All ordinary communications fell far short of the demand; so much so, that post-messengers riding from the Council at Edinburgh to the king in London, or *vice versa*, were stopped whole days on the road for want of horses, which had been taken, sometimes by force, by those who were anxious to be first with their congratulations. As some remedy for this state of things, the Lords of the English Council issued a proclamation, calling upon all magistrates to assist the postmasters "*in this time so full of business*," as "my Lords" naively express it, "by seeing to it that they were supplied with fresh and able horses as necessity shall require." They were to be "able and sufficient horses, well furnished of saddles, bridles, girths, and stirrups, with good guides to look to them; who for the said horses shall demand and receive of such as shall ride on them the prices accustomed."<sup>2</sup>

As the general intercourse between the two capitals promised to become permanent, and travelling along the principal roads increased, further general orders were published from time to time by the customary royal proclamation. Two kinds of post were established during James's reign, and both were in operation together towards its close. They were known as the "thorough post," and "the post for the packet." The first, consisting of special messengers who rode "thorough post," that is, through the whole distance, "with horse and guide," was established in 1603. The couriers were ordered to pay at the rate of "twopence-halfpenny the mile" for the hire of each horse, and to pay in advance. Further, they must not ride any horse more than one stage (or seven miles in summer, and five in winter) except "with the consent of the post of the stage at which they did not change."<sup>3</sup> For the service of the second post, or "the post for the packet," every postmaster was bound

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Forster's *The Grand Remonstrance*, p. 98.

<sup>2</sup> *Book of Proclamations*, 1603—1609. British Museum.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 67.

to keep not less than two horses ready "with furniture convenient," when, on the receipt of a "packet," or parcel containing letters, from a previous stage, he was to send it on towards the next within a quarter of an hour of its receipt, entering the transaction in "a large and fair ledger paper book." As a further precaution, and in order to prevent the courier loitering on the road with any important despatch, each postmaster was required to endorse every single letter with the exact time of the messenger's arrival, just as we have seen in the case of the one found in the collection of Archbishop Parker's correspondence. For the purposes of this packet-post, we find it arranged that each postmaster should have ready "two bags of leather, at the least, well lined with baize or cotton, so as not to injure the letters." It also rested with the different postmasters to furnish the couriers with "*hornes* to sound and blow as oft as the post meets company, or at least four times in every mile." Thus arose a custom which, under modified arrangements, was strictly observed in the days of mail-coaches.<sup>1</sup>

It will be readily observed that in the arrangements of the period there was nothing to prevent at least one of the posts being extensively used, except the important restrictions which the king put upon its use. During the reign of James none but the despatches of ambassadors were allowed to jostle the Government letters in the leather bags, "lined with baize or cotton," of "the post for the packet;" and it was not till towards the end of the reign of his unfortunate son that this post came to be used, under certain conditions, by merchants and private persons. The "thorough post" or "express posts" were exclusively used in conveying the more important despatches, and in the State papers relating to the period we find frequent warrants issued for payment of these extraordinary posts.

It was during the reign of James I. that the Government secured, and kept for a hundred years, certain privileges with respect to the hiring of post horses. We have seen that the royal couriers, travelling with despatches by either of the two posts, had priority of claim to sufficient horses and proper accommodation on the journey. The Government further settled by order in Council, that any person, whether travelling on the

<sup>1</sup> See *Notes and Queries*, 1853, first series.

public business or not, should, if furnished with warrants from the Council, have prior claim to private individuals over post horses and proper entertainment, when they were thus able to demand either in the name of the king. In a warrant of Council, for instance, dated Whitehall, May 16th, 1630, the Privy Council orders all postmasters to furnish Sir Cornelius Vermuyden with horses and guides to enable him to ride post from London to Boston, and thence to Hatfield, where he was engaged in draining the royal chace for the king. The postmasters were not always particular as to how the horses were obtained, for we find in 1625<sup>1</sup> that Sir Anthony Weldon complains to the Privy Council that the postmaster of Dartford violently took one of his geldings from his servant, and sent it forward as a post-horse with an ordinary packet. No action seems to have been taken in the matter, so that we may reasonably conclude that the Privy Council looked upon the matter as a venial transgression, if a transgression at all. In another case, the postmaster of the town of Daventry is the complainant. He writes to Lord Stanhope, the Chief Postmaster, that he furnished one of the king's pursuivants with two able post-horses to carry him to Coventry, and he refuses to pay for them; but has been violent and abusive. He begs Lord Stanhope to report his proceedings to the Lord Treasurer.<sup>2</sup> Again, the postmaster of Dover is most severely dealt with for not using despatch in his business, so much so that we cannot wonder that his neighbour of Dartford used other people's horses without scruple. Sir John Hippesley writes from Dover to the Secretary of State, that if the Duke (Buckingham) does not send to Lord Stanhope to take some course with the postmaster there, "business will certainly miscarry; when the Duke wrote the other day 'for life,' his letter was nine hours coming the fourteen miles." Secretary Conway, in reply, writes to Sir John Hippesley, who was governor of the castle, to commit the postmaster to prison for his neglect. He knew how greatly the Government were concerned because the preparations of the French at Dunkirk increased, and it was only right that he should suffer for his slackness and constant delays; and suffer he did.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *State Papers of the Reign of James I. Domestic Series*, vol. xiv.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* vol. xxiii.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* vol. xxi.

Little as James I. did towards establishing an inland post, though with materials so ready to his hand in the posts of which we have spoken, yet he deserves some credit for setting on foot a general post for letters to foreign countries. It would seem that the abuses complained of by English merchants, with regard to letters coming *from* abroad, had been lessened by the appointment of an English postmaster for the foreign office, but not so with letters *sent* abroad: hence the independent foreign post sanctioned by the king. In another of the very numerous proclamations of his reign, it is stated that His Majesty had created the office of Postmaster-General for Foreign Parts, "being out of our dominions, and hath appointed to this office Matthew de Quester the elder, and Matthew de Quester the younger." The duties of this new office are stated to consist in the "sole taking up, sending, and conveying of all packets and letters concerning his service or business, to be despatched into forraigne parts, with power to grant moderate salaries." These appointments, interfering in many ways with his department, gave great offence to Lord Stanhope, and mutual unpleasantness sprung up between the officers of the two establishments. Lord Stanhope continued by his agents to carry letters abroad, and obtained a warrant prohibiting the De Questers from interfering. Sir John Coke, addressing his fellow secretary, Lord Conway, comments on "the audacity of men in these times, and that Billingsley, a broker by trade (one of Lord Stanhope's agents), should dare to attempt thus to question the king's service, and to derive that power over foreign letters to merchants which in all states is a branch of regal authority. Neither can any place in Christendom be named where merchants are allowed to send their letters by other bodies or posts than by those authorized by the state." It would seem that Billingsley had publicly announced his intention of sending a foreign post away every Saturday to Flushing, Holland, and the Hanse Towns; and "thereafter, if God spared his life and health, to other places." Upon this he was imprisoned, but the House of Commons ordered his release. The Council then took the matter up, and ordered him to desist from his scheme "till the matter could be determined by law." Then ensued a suit in the law courts between Lord Stanhope and the De Questers; it lasted so long

that during the years it was pending, both offices got completely disarranged, some of Lord Stanhope's staff going without salary for as long as eight years ; "divers of them," as we find it given in a petition to the Council, "lie now in prison, by reason of the great debt they are in for want of their entertainment." The postmasters of Andover and Salisbury say that "not having had their pay for six years, they are so indebted that they cannot show their heads."<sup>1</sup> The dispute was not settled until after Charles had been king for six years—namely, in 1632—when Lord Stanhope was induced to retire from the service of Chief Postmaster ; the elder De Quester at the same time assigning the office which he had jointly held with his son, then deceased, to William Frizell and Thomas Witherings. A royal proclamation was thereupon issued, which is curious enough to be given entire :—"Whereas His Majesty's father, King James, of happy memory, for urgent causes did constitute an office called the office of Postmaster-General for Foreign Parts, and had appointed the De Questers to that office, but now the younger one having died, and the elder one being aged and infirm hath made and substituted William Frizell and Thomas Witherings to do all things appertaining to his office, His Majesty is graciously pleased to ratify this arrangement, and doth straightly charge and command all his people, aliens as denizens, that none of them (otherwise than the said W. Frizell and T. Witherings) presume to take up or transmit packets of letters."<sup>2</sup>

We ought not to leave this subject without saying that James I. in establishing this foreign post seems to have been far more anxious that Government secrets should not be disclosed to foreign countries, than that the post should be of much use to traders and merchants. At the same time every endeavour was made to get at the secrets of other Governments who were less careful of their correspondence. The proclamation of the king which established the foreign post ran, that he, "affecting the welfare of his people, and taking into his princely consideration how much it imports his state and this realm, that the secrets thereof be not disclosed to foreign nations, which cannot be prevented if a promiscuous use of transmitting and taking up foreign

<sup>1</sup> *State Papers, Domestic Series*, vol. xxi.

<sup>2</sup> *Rymer's Fœdera*, tom. xix. p. 335.

letters and packets should be suffered, forbids all others from exercising that which to the office of postmaster pertaineth, at their utmost perils." There was a motive for this jealous monopoly of postal communications, made clearer, perhaps, by the following extract from a letter written by one of James's secretaries to the other, Lord Conway: "Your Lordship best knoweth what account we shall be able to give in our place in Parliament of that which passeth by letters in and out of the land, if every man may convey letters as he chooseth." Sir John Coke, the writer of the above, did not confine his attention to foreign letters, if we may believe an English letter-writer, who, addressing a friend in Scotland, wrote: "I hear the posts are way-laid, and all letters taken from them and brought to Secretary Coke; therefore will I not, nor do you, send by that way hereafter."<sup>1</sup>

Witherings, upon whom the principal management of the Post-office now devolved, was an active and painstaking officer; he would seem also to have made good use of his time, for in 1635, or only three years from the date of his appointment, he saw the great necessity which existed for some improvement in the postal resources of the country, and proposed to Charles's Council to "settle a packet post between London and all parts of His Majesty's dominions, for the carrying and recarrying of his subject's letters"—the first proposal ever made in England for a public letter-post. In this memorial, which justly entitles him to a front rank in the number of great postal reformers, Witherings stated some curious facts relating to the service of those days. "Private letters," he said, "being now carried by carriers or persons travelling on foot, it is sometimes full two months before any answer can be received from Scotland or Ireland to London." "If any of His Majesty's subjects shall write to

<sup>1</sup> Lang's *Historical Summary of the Post Office in Scotland*, p. 4. In the next reign Henrietta Maria, in one of her letters to her husband, Charles I. thus writes about Pym. As however, there was an air of treachery about these letters as far as relates to the great parliamentary leader, it is difficult to say whether much dependence should be placed on the fact stated in relation to the Post-office: "I received yesterday," said the queen, "a letter from Pym, by which he sends me word that he fears I am offended with him, because he has not had a letter from me for a long time. I beg you will tell him this is not the case, and that I am as much his friend as ever; but I have so much business, that I have not been able to write by expresses, and by post it is not safe."

Madrid in Spain, he shall receive answer sooner and surer than he shall out of Scotland or Ireland." Witherings, from these and other considerations, is led to propose that the existing Government posts should be used publicly; that the journey between London and Edinburgh should be performed in three days, when—"if the post could be punctually paid—the news will come *sooner than thought*." Witherings' memorial had the desired effect on the Council, who at once set about making the machinery already in use applicable for a general post for inland letters. In 1635 they issued a proclamation, in which they state that there had not been hitherto any constant communication between the kingdoms of England and Scotland, and therefore command "Thomas Witherings, Esquire, His Majesty's Postmaster for forraigne parts, to settle a running post or two, to run night and day between Edinburgh in Scotland and the City of London, to go thither and back again in six days." Directions were also given for the management of the correspondence between the principal towns on the line of road. *Bye* posts shall be connected with the main line of posts, by means of which letters from such places as Lincoln, Hull, Chester, Bristol, or Exeter, shall fall into it, and letters addressed to these and other places shall be sent. Other *bye* posts are promised to different parts of the country. All postmasters on the main line of posts, as well as those of the *bye* posts, were commanded to have "always ready in their stables one or two horses." The charges settled by James I. were ordered to be the charges under the new system, "2½*d.* for a single horse, and 5*d.* for two horses per mile." In a subsequent proclamation two years afterwards, a monopoly of letter-carrying was established, which has been preserved ever since in all the regulations of the Post-office. No other messengers or foot-posts shall carry any letters, but those who shall be employed by the king's "Chief Postmaster." Exceptions were made, however, when the letters were addressed to places to which the king's post did *not* travel; also, in the case of common known carriers; messengers particularly sent express; and to a friend carrying a letter for a friend. These exceptions, trifling as they were, were withdrawn from time to time, as the Post-office became more and more one of the settled institutions of the country. As it



was, the prohibitory clauses caused great dissatisfaction in the country. The middle of the seventeenth century was certainly a bad time for introducing a measure that should bear any appearance of a stretch of the royal prerogative. That no one but the servants of the king's Postmaster should carry private letters was regarded as an unwarrantable interference with the liberty of the subject ; so much so, that in 1642 a Committee of the House of Commons was appointed to inquire into that part of the measure. The subject was also frequently mentioned in Parliament ; notwithstanding which, the Government strictly adhered to the clause.<sup>1</sup>

The first rates of postage for the new service were fixed at twopence for a single letter, for any distance under 80 miles ; 4*d.* up to 140 miles ; 6*d.* for any longer distance in England ; and 8*d.* to any place in Scotland. Of course the distances were all reckoned from London.

The control of the English letter-office was entrusted to the Foreign Postmaster-General, who had suggested the new undertaking. Witherings held the joint offices for five years, when in 1640 he was charged with abusing both his trusts, and superseded by Philip Burlamachy, a London merchant. It was arranged, however, that Burlamachy should execute the duties of his offices under the care and inspection of the principal Secretary of State. And now began a quarrel which lasted incessantly from 1641 to 1647. When the proclamation concerning the sequestration of his office was published, Witherings assigned his patent to the Earl of Warwick. Mindful of this opportunity, Lord Stanhope, the "Chief Postmaster" under the king's father, who had surrendered his patent some years before, now came forward and stated that the action had not been voluntary, but, as we learn from his petition to the House of Lords, he "was summoned to the Council table, and obliged, before he was suffered to depart, to subscribe somewhat there penned upon your petitioner's patent by the Lord Keeper Coventry." Lord Stanhope found a staunch friend and adherent in Mr. Edmund Prideaux, a member of the House of Commons, and subsequently Attorney-General to the

<sup>1</sup> Blackstone, in speaking of the monopoly in letter traffic, states that it is a "provision which is absolutely necessary, for nothing but an exclusive right can support an office of this sort: many rival independent offices would only serve to ruin one another."—*Comm.* vol. 1. . 324.

Commonwealth. Two rival offices were established in London, and continued strife was maintained between the officers of the two claimants. On one occasion, Prideaux himself helped to seize the Plymouth mail which had just arrived in London, and was proceeding to the office of the Earl of Warwick, near the Royal Exchange. On another day, according to the depositions of the Earl's officers, the Chester mail "was met at the foot of Highgate by five persons habited like troopers, on great horses, with pistols, who demanded of these deponents, 'Who hath the letters?' saying they must have them," and they seem to have kept their word.<sup>1</sup> Burlamachy and the Government failed to restore peace. In the Committee of the Post-office, already referred to, the subject was taken up, but the resolution of that Committee only rendered matters more complicated. Though Prideaux contrived to be made chairman of it, the Committee declared that the sequestration of two years before "was a grievance, and illegal, and ought to be taken off," and Mr. Witherings restored to office. It further decided against the Government in the question of the monopoly of letter-carrying, which the king had proclaimed in 1637. The part of the proclamation relating to the establishment of the monopoly ran as follows:<sup>2</sup> "And His Majesty's further will and pleasure is, that from the beginning of this service or employment no other messenger or messengers, foot-post or foot-posts, shall take up, carry, or deliver any letter or letters whatsoever, other than the messengers appointed by the said Thomas Witherings, to any such place or places. And if any post-messenger or letter-carrier whatsoever shall offend contrary to this His Majesty's proclamation, His Majesty, upon complaint thereof made, will cause a severe exemplary punishment to be inflicted upon such delinquents." We may be sure that the frequent subsequent disputes on this subject did not arise from any ambiguity or misreading of the above proclamation. As it was, both questions which the Committee reported upon were left in abeyance for two years longer, when, in 1644, the Parliamentary forces having begun to gain an ascendancy over those of the king, the Lords and Commons by a joint action appointed Edmund Prideaux, the

<sup>1</sup> *Journals of the House of Commons*, vol. ii. pp. 493, 658.

<sup>2</sup> *Bymer's Fœdera*, tom. xix. pp. 649—651.

chairman of the recusant Committee of 1642, "and a barrister of seven years' standing," to the office of Chief Postmaster, which was virtually vacant. It is very amusing to note how the monopolizing tendencies of the Crown, denounced but two years ago by the Parliament, were now openly advocated and confirmed by an almost unanimous vote of both Houses. The resolution establishing Prideaux in the office states<sup>1</sup> that the Lords and Commons, "finding by experience that it is most necessary for keeping of good intelligence between the Parliament and their forces, that post stages be erected in several parts of the kingdom, and the office of Master of the Posts and Couriers being at present void, ordain that Edmund Prideaux shall be, and hereby is, constituted Master of the Posts, Couriers, and Messengers." Prideaux must have been a very energetic and thrifty manager. He is stated to have been very zealous, and to have greatly improved the service at this early stage; "establishing," according to Blackstone, "a weekly conveyance of letters to all parts of the country, thereby saving to the public the charge of maintaining postmasters to the amount of 7,000*l.* per annum." It seems to have been clearly seen by the Parliament of that time that the Post-office would eventually pay its own expenses, and even yield a revenue; for in deciding on Prideaux's proposal, the object of its promoters is stated concisely enough in one of the clauses of the Act:—"That for defraying the charges of the several postmasters, *and easing the State of it*, there must be a weekly conveyance of letters to all parts of the country." For fully twenty years the establishment of the post had been a burden on the public purse to the extent of three or four thousand pounds a year. Prideaux at first was allowed to take the profits of his office, in consideration of his bearing all the charges, and the Government thought they had made a capital bargain. In 1649, five years after his appointment, the amount of revenue derived from the posts reached 5,000*l.* a year, and a new arrangement was thought necessary. Now that the fact had dawned upon the shrewd intelligences of the Commonwealth that the Post-office might be made to pay well, there were numerous offers to take it up in the way of a farm, and thus make as much as possible out of its revenues. The practice

<sup>1</sup> *Journals of the House of Commons*, vol. ii. 1644.

of farming the Post-office revenue actually began in this year (1650)—Mr. Prideaux agreeing to pay down 5,000*l.* a year—and lasted, as far as regards some of the bye posts, down to the end of last century. Prideaux himself seems to have suggested that the office might be farmed to the highest bidder, and some of the pamphleteers of that day pounced upon him very severely. One of them hoped “that the wisdom of this Parliament will not so regard the wily insinuations of any man who desires to farm the same upon pretence that the State wants money, when his only design is to enrich himself at the nation’s prejudice.”

In the year 1649, a decided stand was made against the new Post-office monopoly. The Common Council of London established this year a Post-office for inland letters in direct rivalry to that of the Parliament. The Commons, however, although they had loudly denounced the formation of a monopoly by the Crown, proceeded to put down this infringement of theirs with uncommon vigour. The city authorities, backed, as they were in those days, by immense power, stoutly denied that the Parliament had any exclusive privilege in the matter, or that it had any right to meddle with them. They could see no reason why there should not be “another weekly conveyance of letters and for other uses”—this latter clause most probably meaning a conveyance for packets and parcels. Though pressed to do so, “they refused to seek the sanction of Parliament, or to have any direction from them in their measure.”<sup>1</sup> “The Common Council,” it is further complained by the Post-office authorities, “have sent agents to settle postages by their authority on several roads, and hath employed a natural Scott, who has gone into Scotland, and hath there settled postmasters (others than those of the State) on all that road.” Prideaux took care to learn something from the rival company. He lowered his rates of postage, increased the number of despatches, and, as often happens in relation to competitive schemes, modified many of his arrangements, and then resolutely applied himself to get the city establishment suppressed. The Postmaster-General, who had just become Attorney-General, invoked the aid of the Council of State. After some debate and investigation, the Council reported that “as affairs now stand, they conceive that the office of Postmaster

<sup>1</sup> *Journals of the House of Commons*, 21st March, 1649.

is, and ought to be, in the sole power and disposal of Parliament." This announcement being considered as settling the matter decisively, the city posts were immediately and peremptorily suppressed, and from this date the carrying of letters has remained the exclusive privilege of the Crown. Though the Government succeeded in thus establishing a monopoly, public opinion was greatly against the measure; the authorities of the city of London, as may well be imagined, were incessant in their exertions to defeat it, not only at this time, but on many subsequent occasions. Pamphlets were freely written on the subject, and one of them especially deserves mention, inasmuch as its author bore a name now memorable in the annals of the British Post-office. The title of the pamphlet sufficiently explains its purport, being given as *John Hill's Penny Post; or a vindication of the liberty of every Englishman in carrying merchants' or other men's letters against any restraints of farmers of such employment.* 4to. 1659. "He is the fittest man for the post," says Mr. John Hill, "who will undertake the service at the cheapest rate, which must be the best advantage to the Commonwealth; and it is hoped that the present Councillors of State will eye the good of the public in this particular."

Under the Protectorate, the Post-office underwent material changes. Whilst extending the basis of the Post-office, Cromwell took advantage of the State monopoly to make it subservient to the interests of the Commonwealth. Of this there cannot be a doubt. One of the ordinances published during the Protectorate sets forth that the Post-office ought to be upheld, not merely because it is the best means of conveying public and private communications, but also because it may be made the agent to "*discover and prevent many wicked designs, which have been and are daily contrived against the peace and welfare of the Commonwealth, the intelligence whereof cannot well be communicated except by letters of escript.*"<sup>1</sup> Through the agency of the Post-office, several little matters were brought to light which saved much trouble to the Privy Council of this period. Foreign and home letters shared the same fate. On one occasion the Venetian ambassador remonstrated openly that his letters had been delayed and read, and it was not denied. Of course

<sup>1</sup> Scobell's *Acts and Ordinances*, p. 511, anno 1654.

English letters shared the same fate on the Continent, and in this way the English people were acting only on the principle of diamond cut diamond. Still the facts are as we have stated, as may be more fully seen by reference to the reports of the Secret Committee of the Post-office on letter-opening in 1844. To such an extent, moreover, had this state of things been carried, that a distinct clause in the Post-office Act, passed in the next reign, provided that "no one, except under the immediate warrant of one of our principal secretaries of state, shall presume to open any letters not directed unto themselves." It would have been well had no such provision been made, or so long continued in existence, for a system of espionage was thus settled which has always been abhorrent to the nature and feelings of Englishmen. But we are doing but scant justice to the Council of the Commonwealth, inasmuch as they only followed the course of previous governments, and gave public intimation of so much of their intention, which other governments had not done. In other respects also great improvements were introduced. The Post-office now for the first time became the subject of parliamentary enactments, the Acts passed during the interregnum becoming the models for all subsequent measures. In the year 1656, an Act "to Settle the Postage of England, Scotland, and Ireland" was passed, and henceforth the Post-office was established on a new and broad basis. The account of the third reading of this Act is of sufficient interest and importance to be partly quoted here.<sup>1</sup> The Bill having been brought up for the last reading—

*Sir Thomas Wroth* said: "This Bill has bred much talk abroad since yesterday. The design is very good and *specious*; but I would have some few words added for general satisfaction: to know how the moneys shall be disposed of, and that our letters shall pass free."

*Lord Strickland* said: "When the report was made, it was told you that it (the Post-office) would raise a revenue. It matters not what reports be abroad, *nothing can more assist trade and commerce than this intercourse*. Our letters pass better than in any part whatsoever. In France and Holland, and other parts, letters are laid open to public view, as occasion is."

<sup>1</sup> *Barton's Diary of the Parliament of Cromwell*, vol. iii.

*Sir Christopher Pack* is also of opinion, "That the design of the Bill is very good for trading and commerce; and it matters not what is said abroad about it. As to letters passing free for members, it is not worth putting in any Act."

*Colonel Sydenham* said: "I move that it may be committed to be made but probationary; *it never being a law before.*"

The Bill was referred to a committee, and subsequently it passed nearly unanimously. It was ruled that there "shall be one General Post-office, and one officer styled the Postmaster-General of England and Comptroller of the Post-office." This officer was to have the horsing of all "through" posts and persons "riding post." "Prices for the carriage of letters, English, Scottish, and Irish," as well as foreign, and also for post horses, were again fixed. All other persons were forbidden "to set up or employ any foot-posts, horse-posts, or packet-boats." Two exceptions were made to this prohibitory clause in favour of the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, "who may use their former liberties, rights, and privileges of having special carriers to carry and re-carry letters as formerly they did, and as if this Act had not been made." The Cinque Ports also must "not be interfered with, and their ancient rights of sending their own post to and from London shall remain intact."

It does not appear *why* Prideaux's connexion with the Post-office was dissolved, nor yet exactly *when*. Probably his more onerous duties as first law officer of the Government demanded all his energies. However it was, we hear no more of him in connexion with the Post-office after his victory over the formidable City magnates. At the Restoration, Prideaux retired to his native Cornwall, in the possession of considerable wealth; much of it, we may reasonably assume, the result of his prudent management of the Post-office revenue. During the remaining years of Cromwell's life, these revenues—wonderfully augmented by Prideaux's care and forethought—were farmed for the sum of 10,000*l.* a year, to a Mr. John Manley. In the words of the grant, "the office of postage of letters, inland and foreign, is hereby given, September, 1654, to John Manley, Esq. for a term, under a yearly rent and conditions, with several powers and privileges."<sup>1</sup> During Manley's tenure of office, the proceeds

<sup>1</sup> Scobell's *Acts and Ordinances*, p. 358, anno 1654.

must either have increased with marvellous rapidity, or the contracts were greatly under-estimated ; for when, in 1659, Manley left the Post-office, he calculated that he had *cleared* in that and the previous year, 14,000*l.* annually. A parliamentary committee, in 1660, instituted a strict scrutiny into the proceeds of the office in the first year of the Restoration ; at which period it, of course, became necessary that a new postmaster should be appointed. It was agreed by the members of this committee to recommend that a much higher sum be asked from the next aspirant to the office, inasmuch as they found that Manley, instead of over-estimating his receipts, had erred on the other side, and that they could not have come far short of the annual sum of 20,000*l.*

Mr. Henry Bishop was appointed Postmaster-General at the Restoration, on his entering into a contract to pay to Government the annual sum of 21,500*l.* In a book of curious proclamations, &c. presented to the British Museum by George III. there is one, dated 1660, relating to this appointment, and issued by Charles II. "for the quieting the Postmaster-General in the execution of his office." In this order, or "indenture," as it is called, all other persons except those employed by "our trusty and well-beloved Henry Bishop, Esq. our new Postmaster-General," are forbidden to carry or interfere in any way with the carriage of letters, "as they shall answer at their utmost perils." In the same proclamation, the king "exempts and discharges" all officers connected with the Post-office from serving upon juries, inquests, musters, or any public employment or attendance, "so that they may be the better able to attend to their important business."

The settlement of the Post-office, made under the Commonwealth, was confirmed in almost all its particulars on the return of the Stuarts to power. The statute 12 Car. II. c. 35, re-enacts the ordinance of Cromwell ; and on account of its being the earliest recognised statutory enactment, was commonly known as the "Post-office Charter." It remained in full force until 1710. The following is the important preamble to the statute in question :—"Whereas, for the maintenance of mutual correspondencies and prevention of many inconveniences happening by private posts, several public post-offices have been heretofore



erected for carrying of letters by post to and from all parts and places within England, Scotland, and Ireland, and several parts beyond the seas, the well ordering whereof is a matter of great concernment, and of great advantage, as well for the preservation of commerce as otherwise, Be it enacted, &c." The monopoly of post-horses for travelling was re-secured under 12 Car. II. c. 35, and it will be well to bear this fact in mind, as it brought a considerable item to the net revenue of the Post-office, and helps to account for the rapid increase in that revenue. By a clause in the act referred to, no traveller could hire horses for riding post from any but authorized postmasters. Lord Macaulay states that there was an exceptional clause to this Act, to the effect that "if a traveller had waited half an hour without being supplied, he might hire a horse wherever he could;" but this must have been an arrangement made by some supplementary statute. The Act in question remained in force, under certain limitations, until 1779.

We have now arrived at an interesting period in the history of the Post-office. At the Restoration, the institution rose into some degree of eminence; Acts were passed for its management more frequently than ever, inasmuch as its bearing on every relationship of life had become a matter beyond question. Vague and imperfect before, the materials for the history of this department of State are, from this time, full and minute, and all the incidents and circumstances relating to its management are carefully preserved. We may now describe the Post-office with great particularity of detail,—with what amount of interest the reader will, of course, be the best judge. From the time of James II. to the present day, the records of the Post-office have been kept with scrupulous care, and we regard it as no small privilege to have been allowed to examine them. It has, since 1684, been the invariable custom to chronicle the most minute details in the official letter-books, and these books have been preserved in an almost unbroken series at the General Post-office. For several years previously the papers and documents relating to the Post-office, in common with all other departments of Government, are quite as carefully preserved in the archives of the State-Paper Office; and thus, thanks to the care of the authorities, and the labours of such diligent students of history as Mr.

Brewer, Mr. Bruce, and Mrs. Green, we are not without light for even the earlier periods of the Stuarts' dynasty. The papers relating to the Post-office, for instance, calendered by Mrs. Green,<sup>1</sup> are extremely interesting, and some are in the highest degree amusing. They principally consist of requests and petitions to the Privy Council or the Commissioners of the Treasury. The burden of most of them is that of suffering under the iron rule of Cromwell; of rejoicing now that Charles has got his own again; with everybody loyal to a fault. Thus, John Oldcombe wants to be postmaster of Staines, and assures the Council that the postmaster who then shared the troubles and emoluments of that office, "is a dangerous man, put in by that tyrant Oliver." No more in fear of Cromwell, who hangs a scarecrow on the gibbet near Tyburn turnpike, George Cooling asks to be restored to the office of postmaster of Doncaster, from which he was dismissed by "the late pretended Protector." Then Richard Rosser, of Exeter, wants to be made postmaster of that place, and writes in a taking, lachrymose vein. "He has been a constant sufferer from the tyranny of His Majesty's enemies." He would never have mentioned his sufferings "in the great joy of the Restoration," but for his wife and children—"those patient partakers of all his troubles." The bait does not take, so Rosser tries the double fly. He tells the Secretary of State that he will be glad to take either Exeter or Plymouth. He also says that he "was the first man in Exeter to be taken up and imprisoned on all occasions during the late troubles, and has had his estate detained during 16 years, yet constantly provided for all prisoners sent to the gaol for loyalty." Sometimes the answer returned is recorded, but there does not appear to have been any return made to Rosser for all his services and sufferings, despite his importunities. Like all sycophants, he seems to have overdone it, even for the chartered libertines of the Restoration. James Dawson asks for little, and we are glad he was not refused. He wishes to carry the post letters, as a bye post, between Leeds and Ferrybridge. His father was a man of property, but Lord Fairfax had destroyed it all at the siege of Leeds.

<sup>1</sup> *Calendar of State Papers of the reign of Charles II. Domestic Series.* 1660—1669.

Major Hugh Pennant<sup>1</sup> writes to Secretary Nicholas for the postmastership of Holyhead, which his "knowledge of Wales and Ireland would enable him well to discharge." In the reign of the king's father he was very loyal, and as a return for his loyalty, was "sequestered, imprisoned, and obliged to fly the country."

No doubt but that the officers put into place during the Commonwealth would have a hard time of it, and be closely watched, whether deserving men or not. In 1662, Colonel Slingsby, the governor of the Isle of Wight, writes to the Council that he "has suspended the postmaster there as a schismatical knave, put in by the Rump officers, through whom several packets have miscarried," and requests his dismissal, that way may be made for some one more loyal.

One important resolution in Parliament, at the end of the session in which the Post-office Bill was carried, augurs better for the well-being of the deserving official: for it sets forth that the Post-office being now settled so satisfactorily, "such of the persons who have contributed their pains in improvement of the office be recommended to the King's Majesty for consideration to be had of the pains therein taken accordingly." Let us hope (for we find no further mention of the matter) that all concerned got their deserts. Tardy as the English Government was, compared with its continental neighbours, in rearing the institution of the post, the foundation of an establishment was now laid which has for many years distanced all competitors in its resources, and in the matter of liberal provision for the people. In rewarding, therefore, those who contributed so much to this success at this early period in the history of the establishment, King Charles would simply pay a first instalment of the debt which future generations would owe to them.

Mr. Bishop remained at the head of the Post-office, notwithstanding that several powerful claimants, such as Mr. Frizell and a nephew of Witherings, who had been supplanted during the Commonwealth, put in petitions. But he was left undisturbed for only about two years. In 1662 he was dismissed for certain

<sup>1</sup> A progenitor of the present Colonel Pennant, of that locality, in all probability.

malpractices, and in March, 1663, the office of Postmaster-General is granted to Daniel O'Neale, groom of the bedchamber, as the king's warrant describes him, for the term of seven years. O'Neale engaged to pay the same rental as Bishop, in consideration of which he took all the profits. The indenture drawn out on the occasion, which, like all others of the period, is carefully preserved in the State Paper Office,<sup>1</sup> further ordered him "to give in a catalogue of all officers employed by him ; to dismiss all those excepted against by a Secretary of State, to whom all alterations in postage or erection of post-stages are to be submitted." On the other hand, the Government engaged to make allowances for losses in the revenue, "in case of plague, civil war, or any defects in his grant, with liberty to surrender his office at three months' notice." As O'Neale had the office over the disastrous years of the Plague and the Great Fire, when the Post-office was burned down, it must have been considered a fortunate circumstance that such a reservation was made in his contract.

At the end of O'Neale's term of office (but after a fresh contract had been entered upon) the House of Commons took advantage of the occasion to desire His Majesty that "no further grant or contract of the Post-office be again entered into till a committee inspect the same, and see what improvements may be made in the revenue, as well as in the best management of the department." They said that it was evident that the revenue of the office was increasing at a greater rate than had been paid for the farm for several years past. They pray that the office may be given to the highest bidder. His Majesty replies that he is not satisfied with the hands in which it has been. Notwithstanding that a measure was carried requiring the officers of the Post-office in London and the country to take the oaths of allegiance and supremacy, and notwithstanding that these oaths were properly subscribed, His Majesty is not at all satisfied, "for the extraordinary number of *nonconformists* and disaffected persons in that office," and would almost welcome a change. When a fresh term was expired, His Majesty "will have a care to see it raised to that profit it may fairly be, remembering always that, it being an office of much trust as well as a farm, it

<sup>1</sup> *State Papers, Charles II.* 1660—1669.

will not be fit to give it to him that bids most, because a dishonest or disaffected person is likeliest to exceed that way." There cannot be a doubt now that the king's words on this occasion were meant to prepare the minds of his faithful Commons for the successor which he had by this time fully resolved upon.

But we are to some extent anticipating matters. Complaint was made early in the reign of Charles II. that a wholesale system of letter-opening had been started at the General Post-office. Members of Parliament were amongst the complainants. The attention of the Privy Council having been called to the subject, the king issued another proclamation "for *quieting* the Postmaster-General in his office," and spoke out decisively against letter-opening without sufficient warrant from the Secretary of State. Nor should we forget to state that no means were spared to make the Post-office fruitful during the reign of Charles II. Not only were direct measures sanctioned, but others which had only a bearing on the interests of the Post-office were introduced, and easily carried through the Houses. In 1663, the Turnpike Act made its first appearance on our Statute-book, and we may get from the preamble to this useful Act some idea of the impediments which existed at that time to postal communications. It sets forth that the great North Road—the main artery for the post-roads and the national intercourse—was in many parts "very vexatious," "almost impassable," and "very dangerous." The Turnpike Act provided for needful improvements, and was the beginning of legislation on that subject.

In 1675, in the fifteenth year of the reign of Charles II. an Act was passed entitled "an Act for settling the profits of the Post-office, and a power of granting wine licenses, on His Royal Highness the Duke of York, and his heirs male in perpetuity." In 1674, the revenue was farmed at 43,000*l.* per annum, and two years afterwards Sir William Petty calculated that since 1635 the number of letters had increased in the proportion of 20 to 1. In 1685, the net revenue had increased to the sum of 65,000*l.* per annum ; so that if twenty years before it was an object to keep it from the public, it was more so now than ever. In the last-mentioned year, when the Duke of York became James II.

he not only still kept the revenue in his own hands, but he obtained an Act in the first year of his reign, securing it to himself, with a proviso that it should hereafter be to him, his heirs, and successors, one entire and indefeasible estate in fee simple, and that therefore as such its revenues were not to be accounted for to Parliament. We may as well say here that at the Revolution the Parliament resumed the grant, and nominally did away with it, yet the king still received the money, and left no authentic records of the amounts behind him. With Queen Anne, as we shall see, the matter was put on a much more satisfactory basis.

Within the last two years of the reign of Charles, a penny post was set up in London, the consideration of which we will defer to another chapter. It only remains here to state that Charles commenced the practice of granting pensions out of the Post-office revenue. Just before he died he desired his brother to make provision for Barbara Palmer, Duchess of Cleveland, one of his mistresses, out of the Post-office receipts. James II. in the same year he ascended the throne, acted on the wishes of the "merry monarch" by granting her a pension of 4,700*l.* a year. This pension was paid to the Dukes of Grafton as her representatives up to the year 1856, when 91,181*l.* 17*s.* 7*d.* was paid down to the present duke to redeem the grant.

## CHAPTER IV.

THE POST-OFFICES OF ENGLAND AND THE SISTER COUNTRIES  
UP TO END OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

THE penny Post-office referred to at the conclusion of the last chapter was originated in 1683 for the conveyance of London letters and parcels, by Mr. Robert Murray, an upholsterer. Like many other persons living at that time, Murray was dissatisfied that the Post-office had made no provision for the carrying of correspondence between the different parts of London. By the then existing arrangements, communication was much more easy between town and country than within the limits of the metropolis. Murray's post, got up at great cost, was soon assigned to Mr. William Dockwra, a name which figures for many succeeding years in Post-office annals. The regulations of the new penny post were, that all letters and parcels not exceeding a pound weight, or any sum of money not above 10*l.* in value, or parcel worth not more than 10*l.* might be conveyed at a charge of *one penny* in the city and suburbs, and of twopence to any distance within a given ten-mile circuit. Six large offices were opened at convenient places in London, and receiving houses were established in all the principal streets. Stow says<sup>1</sup> that in the windows of the latter offices, or hanging at the doors, were large placards on which were printed, in great letters, "Penny post letters taken in here." "Letter carriers," adds this old chronicler, "gather them every hour, and take them to the grand office in their respective districts. After the said letters and parcels are duly entered in the books, they are delivered at stated periods by other carriers." The deliveries in the busy and crowded streets near the Exchange were as frequent as six and eight times a day; even in the outskirts as many as four deliveries were made.

<sup>1</sup> *Surveye of London*, vol. ii.

The penny post was soon found to be a great and decided success. No sooner, however, was that success apparent, and it was known that the speculation was becoming lucrative to its originator, than the Duke of York, by virtue of the settlement made to him, complained of it as an infraction of his monopoly. Nor were there wanting other reasons, inducing the Government to believe that it was wrong to allow the penny post to continue under separate management from the General Post. The Protestants loudly denounced the whole concern as a contrivance of the Popish party to facilitate the communication of their plans of rebellion. The famous Dr. Oates hinted that the Jesuits were at the bottom of the scheme, and that if the bags were examined, they would be found full of treason.<sup>1</sup> The city porters, too, complained that their interests were attacked, and long tore down all the placards they could reach which announced to the public the establishment of this innovation on their rights. The Government, however, seems to have thought little of all the clamour, although undoubtedly moved at the *success* of the undertaking. Hence the appeal to the Court of King's Bench, which decided that the new office with all its profits and advantages should become part and parcel of the royal establishment. Docwra was even cast in slight damages and costs. Thus commenced at the General Post-office the branch long known as the "London District Office," which existed as a separate establishment from this time until 1854. At the accession of William and Mary, Mr. Docwra was appointed to the office of Controller of the District Post. This was meant as some sort of compensation for his losses, and was recommended by a committee of the House of Commons. In the third year of the reign of the new sovereigns, a writ of Privy Seal was issued granting Docwra a pension of 500*l.* a year for seven years, "in consideration of the good services performed to the Crown in inventing and settling the business of the penny Post-office."

We do not find that James II. made any grants of pensions during his short reign out of the Post-office revenue. He doubtless required all the money he could raise; often in reply to claims of payment, the petitioners of this period are told that

<sup>1</sup> *Macaulay's History*, vol. i. pp. 387, 388.



their just demands shall be attended to when "His Majesty's affairs become less pressing." Under William and Mary the pressure cannot have been so great, for their Majesties considerably augmented the list of pensioners.<sup>1</sup> In 1694 the list stood thus :—

Duchess of Cleveland . . . . .	£4,700
Earl of Rochester . . . . .	4,000
Duke of Schomberg . . . . .	4,000
Duke of Leeds . . . . .	3,500
Earl of Bath . . . . .	2,500
Lord Keeper Somers . . . . .	2,000
William Docwra . . . . .	500

The pension to Lawrence Hyde, Earl of Rochester, was given from "a grateful sense of numerous good services performed," especially in the office of Lord High Treasurer, and at the Revolution; that to Leeds, of 3,500*l.* was "for negotiating our royal marriage." The writ of Privy Seal granting the pension of Sir John Somers, Knight, Keeper of the Great Seal, dated 15th of May, 1694, sets forth that it is given "for the better and more honourable support and maintenance of him during his custody of our Great Seal." The grant to Maynard, Duke of Schomberg and Leinster, deserves more attention, considering that the pension is still paid in great part, and little is known or remembered of the circumstances under which it was granted. The wording of the writ of Privy Seal, dated February, 1694, is more full and particular than in any previous case.<sup>2</sup> We extract the following :—

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<sup>1</sup> In considering the subject of these Post-office pensions—and it is the custom to speak very severely concerning them—respect should be had to the undoubted fact that the revenues of the Post-office then belonged to, and were at the sole disposal of, the sovereign. In rewarding faithful services (and surely William and Mary set an admirable example in this respect; though evidently mistaken in his estimate of Carmarthen (Leeds) his recognition was just and appreciative of the sterling qualities of Lord Somers, so justly eulogized in the glowing pages of Macaulay, and of the almost pious attachment of Schomberg) they only displayed their munificence with what was really their own. This is worthy of praise rather than blame. After Anne had pensioned Marlborough, no other grant was made from the Post-office receipts, inasmuch as Parliament now fully claimed the control of the revenues derived from this branch of the public service.

<sup>2</sup> *Book of Warrants and Grants*, 1690—1698.

## Post-office Pensions.

“Whereas, soon after our accession to the crown of England, taking into our princely consideration the great, faithful, and acceptable services to us performed by Frederick, Duke of Schomberg, last Master-General of our Ordnance, and Captain-General of our land forces (since deceased), and more especially reflecting upon his most prudent conduct under us, not only in the hazardous attempt which we have made unto this kingdom for redeeming the same from popery and arbitrary power, but also in his continued endeavours to serve us, in order to the completing a prosperous, happy, and settled conditions of affairs in our kingdom.” The warrant then goes on to describe the great losses and the destruction of his castle on the continent “sustained on account of his professing the Protestant religion,” and these and other most weighty considerations, disposing them “to confer upon the said duke and his posterity a reward for his merit which might create a lasting remembrance of the gracious sense we had of his services,” “we therefore fully resolved and determined to bestow upon the said duke the full sum of 100,000*l.* which sum was to be laid out in the purchasing of lands of inheritance. But the grant which was intended by us as aforesaid not passing under our great seal by reason of the sudden departure of the said Duke Frederick for the kingdom of Ireland, where he was slain in our service at the memorable battle of the Boyne, and also by reason that the necessity of our affairs would not admit the speedy payment of so considerable a sum of money, we were graciously pleased to allow to Charles, late Duke of Schomberg, (who hath been also slain in our service at the battle of Marsaglia in Piedmont) the sum of 4,000*l.* per annum, as interest or forbearance of the sum of 100,000*l.* We, therefore, reflecting upon the great merits of the said duke, and being no less sensible of the good, faithful, and constant services to us performed by Maynard, now Duke of Schomberg (third son of Frederick, and brother of Charles), resolve that he shall receive the like allowance of 4,000*l.* per annum, and to continue till we can pay or satisfy the sum of 100,000.”

This sum has never been satisfied, the pension having been paid by the Post-office to the heirs of the duke up to the year 1856, when 20,000*l.* were paid to redeem a fourth part of the pension or grant, the burden of the remaining part being then transferred to the Consolidated Fund. We may as well say here that among the subsequent pensions granted out of the Post-office revenues, Queen Anne gave one, in 1707, of 5,000*l.* to the Duke of Marlborough and his heirs for ever; and that this pension and the one to the heirs of the Duke of Schomberg are the only ones which have not been purchased or fallen in.

The pension to Docwra was made out for seven years, but he held it for three years longer, on a new patent, till the year 1700, when he lost both it and his office, on certain charges of

gross mismanagement having been brought against him. The officers and messengers under his control memorialized the Treasury Lords in a spirited but ill-written petition, which we are here able to give from the *Treasury Book* of that date. The following, we believe, has never before been given entire :—

“The aforesaid William Dockwra doth what in him lies to lessen the revenue of the Penny Post Office, that he may farm it or get it into his own hands, as he claims it his right, and the ways and means are as follows. 1stly. He hath removed the General Post Office from Cornhill, a place most proper, being near the Chauce and in the heart of the city, to a place more remote and altogether improper, whereby the messengers’ walks are altered from one to two hours, so that letters are delayed this time, to the great hindrance of business and fatigue to the poor messengers, and 100*l.* charge to His Majesty to fit up his house for his own convenience. 2ndly. He forbids the taking in of any band-boxes (except very small) and all parcels above a pound, which when they were taken in did bring in considerable advantage to this office, they being now at great charge sent by porters in the city, and coaches and watermen into the country, which formerly went by penny post messengers much cheaper and more satisfactory. 3rdly. He stops under specious pretences most parcels that are taken in, which is great damage to tradesmen by losing their customers or spoiling their goods, and many times hazard the life of the patient when physic is sent by a doctor or apothecary. 4th. That he takes out the one half or some part of several parcels, and sends the other forward, which, if not discovered, ’tis to be supposed he keeps to his own use, however a great fatigue to the owner to run up and down after it. And when the party do come, Mr. Dockwra will not be spoken with or is deny’d for most part of the day when he is within doors, which causes persons to make several journeys six or seven miles to town and back again for no purpose. 5thly. He opens several letters and reads them publicly in the office, and others he takes out bills and sends the letters forward without them. 6th. That he fatigues and oppresses all officers and messengers (except his own creatures) belonging to the six offices, that no man can live easy under him, and only to find faults to turn them out that he may bring his own creatures in, as he himself declares that he cannot bring his own purposes about till all Mr. Castleton’s men (as he calls the old officers) are turned out. 7th. That he buys all contingencies (*e.g.* stores paid for by the authorities) himself, and sets down what he pleases without control, and what he buys (as paper, packthread, pencils, &c.) are such sorry stuff not fit to be used. 8th. That he takes money of the poor messengers when any comes in upon the death or turning out of another. 9th. That the said Mr. Dockwra, with two or three officers confederate with him, hath from time to time knowingly wronged His Majesty of his revenue.”

And thus this catalogue of the worst abuses, stopping and appropriating letters and parcels, intimidating, buying and

selling, and worrying the men is brought to a close. It gives us a vivid, though evidently an exaggerated, picture of the efforts of a man, somewhat unscrupulously endeavouring to get back or hold his own. We cannot wonder, however, that after this memorial, and some of the charges being partially substantiated, Docwra was removed from all connexion with the department. In 1702, Docwra applied himself to Queen Anne to get some compensation for his losses. He stated that he had spent a considerable fortune for the benefit of posterity, and now six of his family of seven children are unsettled and unprovided for in his old age. It is almost pitiable to read the concluding paragraph in his petition to the queen, seeing how much he really accomplished for posterity, though it is not wonderful that it failed to produce the desired effect :—" Your petitioner," says poor Docwra, " prostrates himself at your Majesty's feet, the throne being the refuge of the oppressed subjects and unhappy sufferers ; never believing that your Majesty's incomparable goodness and *entirely English heart* can let a faithful English subject be forgot and his family languish in ruin merely for doing good to his country, but that your petitioner shall find speedy redress from so admirable a queen, whose piety and justice, so conspicuous when in a private state, must by advancing goodness as well as greatness establish the throne, and render it most illustrious."

In the year 1696 we find the Postmasters-General, Sir Robert Cotton and Thomas Frankland, Esq. who had succeeded Sir John Wildman six years before, proposing to erect different cross-posts in the country. In October of that year they propose a post to go twice a week between Bristol and Exeter, estimating the entire expenses at 259*l.* 10*s.* per annum ; each postmaster of the seven stages to be erected over that ground to receive on the average 35*l.* per annum ; the distance of sixty-five miles to be performed in twenty-four hours. In making the proposal to the Lords of the Treasury, the Postmasters-General proceed very cautiously, and show themselves to have been shrewd and able men. They tell them that if the post is established the letters will have to pay but *one* port (postage) instead of two as formerly. A letter from Bristol to Exeter, for instance, would, be charged one postage from Bristol to London, and another

from London to Exeter ; under the new arrangement the letters would not come to London at all, but would just be sent and charged for the distance between the two places. "This would make a serious diminution in the revenue," say they, "only the number of letters will probably be so increased by the means of more expeditious and direct conveyance, as not only to make up for the other loss, but bring in an addition to the receipts." Not only so, "but the tediousness and charge of conveying so few letters under the old system is intolerable." In any case, say they, and supposing it should fail as a financial scheme, the new post "will be a great convenience and benefit to trade." This post was established, and in the course of two or three years it realized an extra revenue of four or five hundred pounds annually. Encouraged by this success, another proposal is soon after made to lay a similar post between Bristol and Shrewsbury ; but this does not seem to have been accomplished. The cross-post system was not thoroughly developed till the next generation, the manner of which development will be seen further on.

From the last case, the reader will understand that the Lords of the Treasury looked very sharply after the Post-office revenue, and many are the instances where reasonable reforms were refused on account of their being likely to reduce, even for a time, the amount of money raised by the carriage of letters. About this time, for example, the gentlemen of Warwick complained that their letters sent from London lost many hours on account of being sent through Coventry instead of direct to Warwick. The Treasury Lords ask the opinion of the Post-office authorities as to the propriety of a change, but they soon give a decided negative to the proposal when they learn the bearing which such a change will have upon the revenue. The Postmasters-General remark that "the post to Warwick having constantly gone by way of Coventry, each single letter to Warwick hath always been charged 3*d.* as being above eighty miles distant. Now Warwick being but really sixty-seven from London, if the post should go the nearest way to it, a penny per letter must be abated, which, together with the charge of setting up some new stages, may amount to a loss of 200*l.* a year." This, of course, is enough for the Lord High Treasurer, and we can scarcely hope that he would relent at the shrewd words with which the Post-

masters-General close their letter:—"We are of opinion, nevertheless, that the alteration these gentlemen propose may probably bring an increase of letters, and likewise be of advantage to the country." It is curious and suggestive that such anomalies, which the Warwick people pointed out in 1698, should continue till the time of penny postage; such, however, was the fact. Had the authorities of the Post-office been blessed with a little more power, seeing that there was at least the glimmering of the true business principle in them, things might not have continued so long crooked. In the eyes of the Lords of the Treasury, however, present profits were regarded with pleasure, and conserved with a strictness which no prospect of increased future revenue could beguile them into abandoning. Another remarkable instance is recorded in the *Treasury Book*<sup>1</sup> of the period, proving in still clearer light how much wiser the Post-office authorities were than the Executive that held them in check. In the year 1692, William and Mary granted a patent to a Mr. Thomas Neale, "to settle post-offices in our plantations of North America," which Neale did with great success. Into the interesting story of this settlement it is impossible for us here to enter; suffice it to say that Neale afterwards applied for increased powers in the matter, and to settle the amount of postages between different parts of North America and the West Indian Islands. When the English Postmasters-General come to speak of the proposals of the American deputy, they humbly submit that the amounts which he puts down are too high, "it having been found by experience in this office," say they, "that the easy and cheap corresponding doth encourage people to write letters, and that our English revenue was very little in proportion to what it now is since the postage was reduced from 6*d.* to 3*d.*; the number of letters being so increased here, we therefore do believe such a settlement may be attended with the like effect in these parts."

The Treasury Lords were slow to sanction any measure demanding much outlay, and from the frequent applications which were made to them by deputy postmasters, before the century closed, to remit their accounts of long standing, which they were "no ways able to pay," we may imagine that their

<sup>1</sup> *Treasury Letter Book*, 1691—1699.

hands were full, and their temper somewhat soured. The *Treasury Letter Book* relating to this reign teems with petitions to the effect that the petitioners have been nearly ruined during the first years of William and Mary, "through much spoiling of their horses by officers riding post in the late blessed Revolution." Others grumble at the lowness of their salary. For instance, Ralph Rishton, late deputy-postmaster of Preston, tells the Treasury Lords that "for many years he provided horses, and despatched the packets between Wigan and Kendal, which is a hundred north country miles, forwards and backwards, for a salary of only 70*l.* per annum; and also found horses and despatched packets from Wigan to Lancaster, which is sixty-eight long miles, for a salary of 50*l.* per annum, spending his whole time with the two services; and, though your petitioner begun with a considerable fortune, he is now penniless and beggared, and dismissed the office because he is in arrears." He prays that his debts may be remitted, and that the Postmasters-General may not be permitted "to pursue him and put him in prison." Other deputies argue that it was all very well that during the civil wars and at the Revolution they should have low salaries, because they were then exempted from having soldiers quartered upon them, but now that the time of peace had happily come, they urge that their salaries should be raised. In many instances, the Post-office authorities support these prayers. Into the details of the Post-office Packet Service, managed by the able and indefatigable Postmasters-General of whom we have been speaking, we will not here enter until we come to speak of them under Queen Anne. We have already delayed long enough our notice of the Scotch and Irish establishments.

Almost the first mention of anything relative to the Post-office or posts in Scotland occurs in the proceedings of the municipality of Aberdeen.<sup>1</sup> It would seem that long before there was any regular post in Scotland, special messengers were employed by different townships to carry letters certain short distances, say between one town and the next adjoining principal town. In the 16th century, the city of Aberdeen kept a special officer constantly employed, who was called the "common post," for the sole purpose of carrying letters; and in September, 1595, according

<sup>1</sup> Chambers' *Domestic Annals of Scotland*, vol. i.

to Kennedy,<sup>1</sup> this individual, named "Alexander Taylor, alias *Checkum*," was ordered by the magistrates a livery of blue, with the city arms painted on the left sleeve of his coat. Other persons were also employed in emergencies, "and the town's disbursements on this ground continue to occupy a prominent place in its accounts down to 1650, if not later." The first regular letter post established in Scotland was one between Berwick and Edinburgh, in 1635, when Charles II. improved upon the horse post of his father, as a means of forwarding the Government despatches between London and Edinburgh. There was previously a system of posts limited to the principal roads, but the work was done but imperfectly, as we find from the Council records of the period. On the 29th of March, 1631, for instance, the Lords of the Council dealt with the postmaster of Haddington very severely for having lost a packet of letters belonging to His Majesty. From the same case we learn that the postmaster there was required to have fresh horses always ready for the forwarding of such packets as might arrive at his office, just as we have seen in the English arrangements of the period.

In 1642, owing to the sending of forces from Scotland to put down the Irish rebellion, it was found that the post arrangements in the south-west of Scotland were defective in the extreme. The Scotch Council thereupon proposed to establish a line of posts between Edinburgh and Portpatrick, and Portpatrick and Carlisle: the English Council, being more immediately concerned in the rebellion, agreed to bear the whole expense. In the Council records of that year, according to Mr. Chambers, there is a list of persons recommended by the Commissioners for appointment on the two lines of road as postmasters, "such persons being the only ones fit for that employment, as being innkeepers and of approved honesty."<sup>2</sup> Seven years afterwards, in 1649, we find the Post-office at Edinburgh was under the care of John Mean, husband of the woman who discharged her stool at the Bishop's head when the service book was introduced into St. Giles's in 1637. Who knows but that this circumstance gave Mean favour in the sight of anti-prelatical Cromwell, who at

<sup>1</sup> Kennedy's *Annals of Aberdeen*, vol. i. p. 262.

<sup>2</sup> *Domestic Annals of Scotland*, vol. ii. p. 142.



this time wielded the destinies of the entire island? Mean seems to have borne the charges of attending to the office "without any reasonable allowance therefor;" and petitioning the Committee of Estates to that effect, they allowed him to retain "the eighth penny on all letters sent from Edinburgh to London (no great number), and the fourth penny upon all those coming from London to Edinburgh." In 1654, the postage from Edinburgh to London and *vice versa* was lowered to 4*d.* by order of the Council of the Commonwealth.

At the Restoration, the Edinburgh Post-office was controlled by Robert Mein, under the title of "Sole Keeper of the Letter Office in Edinburgh." Mr. Lang,<sup>1</sup> quoting from the *Privy Seal Register*, 1660—1666, says that he had held the office before, *i.e.* during the reign of the first Charles. Charles II. bestowed the office of Postmaster-General of Scotland upon Patrick Graham, Esq. of Inchbrakie, with the magnificent salary of 500*l.* Scots yearly,—or about 40*l.* sterling per annum! The place, however, seems at this time to have been a mere sinecure. Many improvements were made under the judicious management of Mr. Mein. In 1667, a post was started between Edinburgh and Aberdeen, to go twice a week "for the *timous* delivery of letters and receiving returns of the *samen*." Two years afterwards Inverness got dissatisfied with the want of postal communication, when Mein was commissioned to establish a constant footpost between Edinburgh and Inverness, going once a week, "wind and weather serving."<sup>2</sup> Wind and weather serving is an amusing qualification, as pointed out by Mr. Chambers, considering that there were only one ferry of six or seven miles, and another of two miles to cross. About the same time, the Edinburgh postmaster is useful in another capacity, for in that year the Privy Council grant him a warrant "to put to print and publish *one diurnal weekly*, for preventing false news which may be invented by evil and disaffected persons."

<sup>1</sup> *Historical Summary of the Post Office in Scotland*, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> The wording of the proclamations for stage coaches, &c. are very various, and sometimes exceedingly amusing. In England, the Divine hand was generally recognised in the formula of "God willing," or, "If God should permit." On the other hand, the Scotch resoluteness of the following could not well be surpassed, where a wagon was announced to leave Edinburgh for Inverness "every Tuesday, God willing, but on Wednesday, *whether or no*."

John Graham was appointed Postmaster-General for Scotland in 1674, with a salary of 1,000*l.* Scots, or 83*l.* sterling, per annum. The new chief, it would seem, set about his duty with great spirit. He travelled much in the provinces for the purpose of noticing defects in the postal arrangements, and then remedying them by setting up a number of local posts. In doing all this, however, he "caused himself expenses that his salary would not meet," which is by no means surprising. He ran into debt, and had to take money belonging to his wife to free himself from his liabilities. Graham was released from his troubles by death, when his wife petitioned the Privy Council to have her own again with some success. No one, however, would take the office after Graham, so it was put up to "public roup."

In the records of the daily outgoings and incomings of this period we find much to interest and amuse; the post-boys, from the nature of their business, meeting at times with strange adventures. In 1690, "the post-boy," one Andrew Cockburn, forty-four years old, (most of the "post-boys" being grown men) carrying the letter-bags between Cockburnspath and Haddington, was assailed by two Jacobites in masks; one of them, "mounted on a blue grey horse, wearing a stone grey coat, with brown silk buttons; the other riding on a white horse, having a white English grey cloak coat." They threatened to kill the man if he did not instantly deliver up "the packet, the *black box*, and the bye bag," and he had no choice but to yield.<sup>1</sup> The post from Edinburgh to London went frequently wrong, and that owing to strange casualties. One which left Edinburgh was never heard of after leaving Berwick. "A most diligent search was made, but neither the boy, the horse, nor the packet, has yet been heard of." It is supposed that he perished in crossing the sands near the Holy Island. On another occasion, the mail coming from London did not reach Edinburgh till late, when it was apologised "that the post-boy, who rode one of the stages, perished in the River Tyne at Newcastle,—the mail being taken out of that river." Again, soon afterwards the post-boy (another middle-aged man) "who made the stage between Dunbar and Haddington, being in liquor, fell off. The

<sup>1</sup> *Domestic Annals of Scotland*, vol. iii. p. 32. "The Black Box" contained the Government despatches.

horse was found some distance away, but mail, saddle, and bridle were all gone."

Under William and Mary, in 1695, the Scotch Post-office was settled upon a new and firmer basis. It was to a considerable extent amalgamated with the English office, though it was provided that there should be a Postmaster-General for Scotland, appointed by letters patent under the Great Seal of England. Postages were resettled; all others were prohibited from interfering with the carriage of letters, or if convicted, "to be imprisoned for six days for ilk fault, and fined in the sum of six pounds Scots, '*toties quoties*.'" Finding that the office of Postmaster-General was not held in great repute, the king decided upon making a grant of the whole revenue of the Scotch office, as well as a salary of 300*l.* sterling, to Sir Robert Sinclair, of Stevenson, on condition that he would keep up the establishment.<sup>1</sup> In a year from that date Sir Robert gave up the grant as unprofitable and irksome. We will only further mention that the robberies, such as we have just described, increasing, especially in the neighbourhood of the Borders, the two Parliaments of England and Scotland jointly passed Acts in 1698 and 1699 making the robbery or seizure of the public post "punishable with death and confiscation of moveables."

Little is known of the earlier postal arrangements of Ireland. Before any legislative enactments were made, it is said, in the reign of Charles I. the letters of the country were transmitted in much the same way as we have already seen they were forwarded in the sister country. The Viceroy of Ireland usually adopted the course common in England when the letters of the king and his council had to be delivered abroad. The subject is seldom mentioned in contemporary records, and we are left to picture in our minds the way in which correspondence would then be transmitted. In the sixteenth century, mounted messengers were employed carrying official letters and despatches to different parts of Ireland. Private noblemen also employed their "intelligencers," as they were then and for some time afterwards called, to carry their letters to other chiefs or their dependents. The Earl of Ormond was captured in 1600, owing to the faithlessness of Tyrone's "intelligencer," who first took

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Lang's *Historical Summary*, p. 8.

his letters to the Earl of Desmond and let him privately read them, and afterwards demurely delivered them according to their addresses.<sup>1</sup>

Charles I. ordered that packets should ply weekly between Dublin and Chester, and also between Milford Haven and Waterford, as a means of insuring quick transmission of news and orders between the English Government and the Vice-regal Court at Dublin Castle. We have seen that packets sailed between Holyhead and Dublin, and Liverpool and Dublin, as early as the reign of Elizabeth. Cromwell kept up both lines of packets established by Charles. At the Restoration, only one—namely, that between Chester and Dublin—was retained, this being applied to the purposes of a general letter post. The postage between London and Dublin was 6*d.* fresh rates being imposed for towns in the interior of Ireland. A new line of packets was permanently established at the Revolution, to sail between Port Patrick and Donaghadee; forming an easy and short route between Scotland and the north of Ireland. For many years the mail was conveyed in an open boat, each trip across the narrow channel costing the Post-office a guinea. Subsequently a grant of 200*l.* was made by the English Treasury in order that a larger boat might be built for the service.

Of the details of the Irish service up to the end of the seventeenth century we have been unable to find much of interest. The annals are so bare and meagre that, after considerable search, we are inclined to doubt, with Mr. Trollope, whether the early Irish Post-office has any annals at all. Certainly all we have found consists of correspondence with the English office, preserved among the records at St. Martin's le Grand. A petition which George Warburton, Esq. the Deputy Postmaster-General for Ireland, addressed to the Lords of the Treasury<sup>2</sup> towards the close of the reign of William III. is replete with interest, and is of much historical importance. From this document we not only get some curious glimpses into the Post-office management at that time, but a graphic picture of the "state of Ireland." It is only necessary to premise that

<sup>1</sup> *Letters and Despatches relative to the taking of the Earl of Ormond*, by O'More, A.D. 1600.

<sup>2</sup> *Treasury Letter Book*, 1691—1699.

Mr. Warburton was "manager of the Irish office" from 1683 until James II. visited Ireland on his accession to the throne. According to Warburton himself, James, finding him "a strict Protestant," turned him out and put in a Papist; on King William's visit to Dublin, "after the rout of the Boyne," he restored Warburton, and he with great ability and diligence discharged the duties of his office up to the time of which we are speaking. During his first tenure of office, however, he had contracted a serious amount in arrears—still standing against him—and he now petitions the Treasury to have it remitted on the following grounds. The postmasters of Ireland were in debt to him, "because they necessarily required to be trusted; yet the debts would not have amounted to near what they did, but by the failure of Protestant postmasters and others by the oppression of the Papists after the arrival of Tyrconnell at the Government, who turned many of them out of their places, appointing Papists to be entertained (*sic*), who neither were of ability to make payments, most of whom are either now dead or by the misery of the war made poor and insolvent." This circumstance accounts for one little item in the arrears, but there were other reasons for the discrepancy. The Postmaster-General would be allowed, in the ordinary course of business, certain sums for "State" letters, overtaxings, and insolvent or dead letters; these sums to be deducted from the gross amount of his bill. "But your petitioner is not able to make out all these particulars by reason of the *distraction and confusion of these times*. Numbers of insolvent (that is, dead and returned) letters some time before and after the Revolution being very great, for that there were many letters and packets directed to Protestants, *which they durst not own to*; others were embezzled by the said Popish Government, who, distrusting your petitioner, sometimes before and always after the Revolution, *opened the mails at the castle among themselves*, taking what letters they pleased in favour of their cause, without any regard to your petitioner being accountable for the same." Well might the Postmaster-General be in arrears under such circumstances! He then prays the Treasury Lords to take these facts into their consideration; to think of his losses and his sufferings, and the extraordinary trouble he has had in the execution of his office;

the great danger and hazard which he has outlived, and remit the old arrears. Their lordships send his petition to the Postmasters-General—the same shrewd men of whom we have already spoken—who readily certify to the correctness of the Irish Deputy's historical statements, though they confess they cannot understand his figures; “for,” say they, “several of the sums are made up only by computation, and it is impossible by letter to receive such satisfaction to several particulars in the said account, as if the postmaster was examined *viva voce*.” As however Mr. Warburton is still Deputy Postmaster, “and his coming over here would be of ill consequence to His Majesty's service,” they suggest that the Auditor-General might send some one over to examine the accounts and report to their lordships. This was done to the satisfaction of the Treasury Lords, and the Postmasters-General, in a final letter, warmly espouse Warburton's case. “The late King James, looking upon him as a man not at all in his interests, thought fit to remove him, whereupon the petitioner intended to have come to England, as several others of the Protestants of that time did, but the present Earl of Rumney having signified to Warburton that he would be better able to serve King William (then Prince of Orange) in Ireland than in England, he remained;” not altogether, as we have seen, to his peace and comfort. Mr. Warburton's petition was granted.

We find abundant proof among the records that Warburton and his subordinates suffered for their Protestantism. Nevertheless, from the circumstances under which the Deputy Postmaster-General closed his official career, there is room to doubt whether his standard of integrity was a high one. “In 1703,” in the words of the English chiefs, “he absconding himself became a bankrupt, to the surprise of all that knew him, he being reputed a man of considerable state, and having been in our employment near thirty-seven years, and several times a member of parliament in that kingdom.” It was calculated that he had made away, altogether, with at least 6,000*l.* of the public money. Mr. Isaac Manley, the Controller of the English Letter Office, was sent over to report on the state of the office. His report is so lucid and interesting that we regret our want of space to reproduce it here. He found the whole establishmen

so full of abuses and "inconsistencies," that he was led to propose an entire change of plan and mode of working. The Postmasters-General thought well of his proposals, and asked him to remain till he had set things to rights. Subsequently, but only after the Treasury Lords had agreed to give more salary, Mr. Manley is permanently appointed to the place.

In the same year 1703, Elizabeth, Dowager Countess of Thanet, gets a grant from the queen to erect a penny Post-office in Dublin, similar to the one in existence in London.

## CHAPTER V.

## ON OLD ROADS AND SLOW COACHES.

IF we seem in this chapter to make a divergence from the stream of postal history, it is only to make passing reference to the tributaries which helped to feed the main stream. The condition of the roads, and no less the modes of travelling, bore a most intimate relationship, at all the points in its history, to the development of the Post-office system and its communications throughout the kingdom. The seventeenth century, as we have seen, was eventful in important postal improvements; the period was, comparatively speaking, very fruitful also in great changes and improvements in the internal character of the country. No question that the progress of the former depended greatly on the state of the latter. James the First, whatever might be his character in other respects, was indefatigable in his exertions to open out the resources of his kingdom. The fathers of civil engineering, such as Vermuyden and Sir Hugh Myddleton, lived during his reign, and both these eminent men were employed under his auspices, either in making roads, draining the fen country, improving the metropolis, or in some other equally useful scheme. The troubles of the succeeding reign had the effect of frustrating the development of various schemes of public utility proposed and eagerly sanctioned by James. Under the Commonwealth, and at intervals during the two succeeding reigns, many useful improvements of no ordinary moment were carried out.

In the provinces, though considerable advances had been made during the century, travelling was still exceedingly difficult. In 1640, perhaps the Dover Road, owing to the extent of continental traffic constantly kept up, was the best in England; yet three or four days were often consumed in the journey between Dover and London. In that year, Queen



Henrietta and household were brought "with expedition" over that short distance in four long days. Many remarkable examples of expeditious travelling are on record, notwithstanding. One case related by Clarendon proves that rapidity of communication was comparatively easy when speed was a vital necessity. When Charles I. was living at York, gentlemen couriers engaged to travel the distance between London and York with his letters to and from his Council. "It was a wonderful expedition that was then used," says the royalist historian, "between London and York, when gentlemen undertook the service, as enough were willing to do; insomuch, as when they despatched a letter on Saturday night about twelve at night, they received always the king's answer, Monday by ten o'clock of the morning."<sup>1</sup> So that these couriers usually accomplished the distance between London and York and back, or near 500 miles, in thirty-four hours. Well might Mr. Forster, who also quotes the account in his *Grand Remonstrance*, say that it is remarkable to us even in these days. Clarendon also relates that Charles I. lost the services of his English fleet at the breaking out of the Rebellion, partly by the over haste of Mr. Edward Villiers, one of his pages, and partly by the sailing of a portion of the fleet. Villiers, "whose dexterity and diligence as a gentleman messenger His Majesty found fit for any trust," had to travel to the Downs with letters to the captains to obey the orders of Sir John Pennington, and not the Earl of Warwick. Another messenger, sent to London with letters revoking the Earl of Northumberland's Commission of Lord High Admiral, was directed "not to make such haste, but that Villiers might be at least as soon at the Downs as he in London." Had this arrangement, the particulars of which are minutely related, not miscarried, Villiers having done his work much too quickly, "it is very probable," says Clarendon, "that the king had been master of many of his ships again."<sup>2</sup>

Persons travelling for pleasure or on account of the exigencies of trade and commerce fared but badly from the state of the roads at this period. Short journeys were accomplished in a reasonable time, inasmuch as little entertainment was required.

<sup>1</sup> Clarendon's *Life*, vol. i. p. 135.

<sup>2</sup> *History of the Rebellion*, vol. i. p. 524.

It was different when a long journey was contemplated, seeing that generally the hostelries afforded but sorry accommodation. Whittaker tells us<sup>1</sup> that when the noble family of Clifford required to travel between their houses at Skipton and Westmoreland, which they did twice a year, they had sad work of it, though they chose the best seasons for the occasion. The roads by which they journeyed were impracticable for any kind of carriage except a litter for the ladies and the children. How they were entertained on the way, where they slept, and how they fared is matter of exceeding wonderment to their versatile and genial historian, "they must have carried their own beds, as well as provisions" during these annual peregrinations "of this cumbersome train of hardy and ill-accommodated greatness." The roads, indeed, were so bad in many parts of England that it was not at all uncommon, when a family intended to travel, for servants to be sent on beforehand to investigate the country, and report upon the most promising track. In 1665, Cowley invited his friend Dean Sprat, afterwards his biographer and Bishop of Rochester, to visit him at Chertsey. Lest the distance (twenty-two miles) and the attendant difficulties should deter the little man from coming, Cowley showed how he might accomplish the distance quite easily in a couple of days "by sleeping the first night at Hampton Town."

The innkeepers of the period were usually the postmasters also, contracting to find requisite horses for the different stages. They were meagrely paid, and their establishments therefore would be meagre likewise ; but they were an interesting class of men, some of them rivalling any Boniface on record. In the works of Taylor, the Water Poet, we have a number of these men described with considerable power, if not grace, of verse. Taylor made a journey into Scotland in the reign of James I. stopping at the hostelries on the road, and paying for his entertainment by his exuberant and boisterous wit and anecdote. The title of the account of his journey will of itself sufficiently explain how he managed :—*The Pennyless Pilgrimage, or the Moneyless Perambulations of John Taylor, alias the King's Majesty's Water Poet. How he travelled on foot from London to Edinburgh, not carrying any money to and fro, neither*

<sup>1</sup> *History of Craven*, p. 309.

*begging, borrowing, or asking Meat, Drink, or Lodging.*<sup>1</sup> He seems to have found nearly all the postmasters and innkeepers unexceptionable and glad of his company, if not for themselves, yet for their other guests; free with all they had, and never asking payment.

“There did my loving friendly host begin  
To entertain me freely to his inn;  
And there my friends, and good associates,  
Each one to mirth himself accommodates,”

is the refrain of his song at each goodly town he enters, until he comes to Huntingdon on his way back to London. At the recollection of this town his muse seems to have frozen, for he tells in prose how he “rode to Huntingdon, where he lodged at the postmaster’s house, at the sign of the ‘Crown’; his name is Riggs. He came up to my chambers and supped with us (for Taylor picks up a companion on his way back), and very bountifully called for three quarts of wine and sugar, and four jugs of beer. He did drink and begin healths like a horse-leech, and swallowed down his cups without feeling, as if he had had the dropsy, or nine pounds of spunge in his maw. In a word, *as he is a post, he drank post*, striving by all means to make the reckoning great, or to make us men of great reckoning. But in *his* reckoning he was tied like a jade, leaving the gentleman who was with me to discharge *the terrible shot*, or else one of my horses must have lain in pawn for his supercilious calling and unmannerly intrusion.” This last incident seems to have gone far to mar the rhymester’s pleasure during the journey: still it can scarcely be thought that he did amiss.

Many improvements were made in the modes of conveyance during the century. A kind of stage-coach was first used in London about 1608; towards the middle of the century, they were gradually adopted in the metropolis and in the better highways around London. In the reign of Charles I. they had increased so much that the king issued a proclamation to the following effect:<sup>2</sup>—“The King’s Majesty perceiving of late times the great number that are of hackney coaches kept and

<sup>1</sup> Taylor’s *Works*, 1630. From a fine copy in the library of Writers to the Signet in Edinburgh.

<sup>2</sup> Rymer’s *Fœdera*, tom. xix. p. 721.

used in the cities of London and Westminster, as also the general and promiscuous use of coaches in and about the said cities, whereby not only a great disturbance grows to His Majesty, his dearest consort the queen, the nobility and others of place and degree in their passage through the streets of the said cities, but the streets themselves so pestered and the pavements broken up, as the common passage is thereby hindered and made dangerous." With the advice of his Privy Council he therefore prohibits "all coaches that do not travel at least three miles out of the cities of London and Westminster." All are prohibited from going in the coaches except the owner "keep within the city four able and sufficient horses or geldings for His Majesty's service whenever his occasions shall require," upon pain of his high displeasure and indignation as well as penalties. This prohibition was not enforced after Charles's death. Before the century closed, stage-coaches were placed on three of the principal roads in the kingdom, namely, those between London and York, Chester and Exeter. This was only for the summer season; "during winter," in the words of Mr. Smiles, "they did not run at all, but were laid up for the season like ships during Arctic frosts." Sometimes the roads were so bad, even in summer, that it was all the horses could do to drag the coach along, the passengers, *perforce*, having to walk for miles together. With the York coach especially the difficulties were formidable. Not only were the roads bad, but the low Midland Counties were especially liable to floods, when, during their prevalence, it was nothing unusual for passengers to remain at some town *en route* for days together, until the roads were dry. Ralph Thoresby was more than once in danger of being drowned by these floods. On one occasion he was detained four days at Stamford, and then only ventured to proceed because a convoy of members of Parliament, with the necessary attendants and guides, came up on their way to London, and offered him assistance. Thoresby's "*Diary*" is full of unlucky travelling incidents. "On the Derbyshire roads," says a Mr. Browne, who made a "*Tour in Derbyshire*," 1662, travellers were in constant fear of their necks, and were frequently compelled to alight and lead their beasts."

Public opinion was divided as to the merits of stage-coach

travelling. When the new threatened altogether to supersede the old mode of travelling on horseback, great opposition manifested itself, and the organs of public opinion (the pamphlet) began to revile it. One pamphlet, which we have seen,<sup>1</sup> went so far as to denounce the introduction of stage-coaches as the greatest evil "that had happened of late years in these kingdoms;" "mischievous to the public, prejudicial to trade, and destructive to lands." "Those who travel in these coaches contract an idle habit of body; become weary and listless when they had rode a few miles, and were then unable to travel on horseback, and not able to endure frost, snow, or rain, or to lodge in the fields." Mr. Chamberlayn, however,<sup>2</sup> thought differently to this anonymous writer, and in all the editions of his well-known book, from 1649 to 1674, never saw fit to alter his text. In speaking of the Post-office he says, that, "besides the excellent arrangement of conveying men and letters on horseback, there is of late such an *admirable commodiousness*, both for men and women to travel from London to the principal towns in the country, that the like hath not been known in the world, and that is by *stage-coaches*, wherein any one may be transported to any place, sheltered from foul weather and foul ways; free from endamaging of one's health and one's body by hard jogging or over-violent motion; and this not only at a low price (about a shilling for every five miles) but with such velocity and speed in one hour as that the posts in some foreign countries cannot make in a day."

The stage-wagon was used for the conveyance of merchandize. On the principal roads strings of stage-wagons travelled together. Besides these conveyances there were "strings of horses,"—pack-horses travelling somewhat quicker for the conveyance of light goods or passengers, and generally on narrow paths known as "pack-horse roads." About a mile eastward from Haltwhistle in Northumberland, adjoining the old mail-coach road, and within a hundred yards of the railway, may still be seen one of these pack-horse roads of 200 years ago in a good state of preservation; thus within a stone's throw of each other we may

<sup>1</sup> *The Grand Concern of England Explained in several Proposals to Parliament.* Harl. MSS. vol. viii. pp. 561—569.

<sup>2</sup> *Present State of Great Britain.* London.

have a good historical illustration of the changes which a couple of centuries have seen in the means of locomotion. The stage-wagon, as a rule, travelled extremely slow—except on the road between Liverpool and London; they seldom changed horses, using the same cattle throughout. The pace, indeed, was so proverbially slow in the North of England, that the publicans of Furness in Lancashire, when they saw the conductors of the travelling merchandize trains appear in sight on the summit of Wrynose Hill, on their way between Whitehaven and Kendal, were jocularly said to begin to brew their beer, always having a stock of good drink manufactured by the time the travellers reached the village!

Whilst communication between different large towns was comparatively easy—travellers passing between London and York in less than a week before the reign of Queen Anne—there were towns situated in the same county, in the year 1700, more widely separated for all practical purposes than London and Inverness are at the present day. If a stranger penetrated into some remote districts about this period, his appearance would call forth, as one writer remarks, as much excitement as would the arrival of a white man now in some unknown African village.<sup>1</sup> So it was with Camden in his famous seventeenth century *Tour*. Camden acknowledges that he approached Lancashire, “that part of the country lying beyond the mountains towards the Western Ocean,” from Yorkshire, with a “*kind of dread*,” but trusted to Divine Providence, which, he said, “had gone with him hitherto,” to help him in his attempt to learn something of these English barbarians. Country people still knew little except of their narrow district, all but a small circle of territory being like a closed book to them. They still received but few letters. Now and then a necessity would be laid upon some of them to write, and thereupon they would hurry off to secure the services of the country parson, or some one attached to the great house of the neighbourhood, who generally took the request kindly. Almost the only intelligence of general affairs was

1 Mr. Francis Mewburn, of Darlington, a name deservedly respected in the neighbourhood where he resides, the father of railway lawyers, whose memory extends to some of the years of last century, kindly informs us that he can remember such manifestations as these among the dales of Yorkshire where his father resided: a model landlord by all accounts.

communicated by pedlars and packmen, who were accustomed to retail news with their wares. The wandering beggar, who came to the farmer's house craving a supper and a bed, was often welcomed both in England and Scotland as an intelligencer of the rural population. The introduction of newspapers formed quite an era in this respect to the gentlefolk of the country, and to some extent the poorer classes shared in the benefit. The first English newspaper bears the date of 1622.<sup>1</sup> Still earlier than this, the news-letter, copied by the hand, often found its way into the country, and, when well read at the great house of the district, would be sent round among the principal villagers till its contents became diffused throughout the entire community. When any intelligence unusually interesting was received, either in the news-letter or the more modern newspaper, the principal proprietor would sometimes cause his immediate dependents and the villagers to be summoned to his house at once, when he would read to them the principal paragraphs from his porch. The reader of English history cannot comprehend the facts of our past national life if he does not know, or remember, how slowly and imperfectly intelligence of public matters was conveyed during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and what a bearing—very difficult to understand in these days—such circumstances had upon the facts themselves. We think it is Mr. Froude who first hints that, under these circumstances, a rebellion in one part of the country, which was likely to be popular throughout the entire kingdom, might be quelled before any intimation of the rising reached the adjoining county. Remote districts waited for weeks and months to learn the most im-

<sup>1</sup> The *Weekly News*, edited by Nathaniel Butter. That was followed in 1663 by the *Intelligencer* of Roger L'Estrange. The *London Gazette*, or as it was called for the first two years, the *Oxford Gazette* (parliament sitting at Oxford) was started in 1665. Other papers followed rapidly, till the publishers were at a loss to fill the sheets with news. In 1695, the *Flying Post* was established, and its publisher announced, that "if any gentleman has a mind to oblige his country friend with this account of public affairs, he may have it for 2d. at the Rising Sun in Cornhill, on a sheet of fine paper; half of which being blank, he may thereupon write his own business, or the *material news* of the day." Again, *Dawkes's News Letter* "will be done up on good writing-paper, and blank space left, that any gentleman may write his private business. It will be useful to improve the younger sort in writing a curious hand." The stamp duty commenced in 1712, and taxed every sheet a half-penny, but did not materially lessen the numbers of newspapers.

portant intelligence. Lord Macaulay relates that the news of Queen Elizabeth's death, which was known to King James in three days, was not heard of in some parts of Devonshire and Cornwall till the court of her successor had ceased to wear mourning for her. The news of Cromwell having been made Protector only reached Bridgewater nineteen days after the event, when the church bells were set a-ringing. In some parts of Wales the news of the death of King Charles I. was not known for two months after its occurrence. The churches of the Orkneys continued to put up the usual prayers for him for months after he was beheaded ; whilst their descendants did the same kind office for King James long after he had taken up his abode at St. Germain's. What, however, can be thought of all this, extraordinary as it may seem in these days of railroads and telegraphs, when it is stated that in a certain village of Lancashire the news of the battle of Waterloo never reached the inhabitants until near the first anniversary of that memorable fight, when the church bells rung out rejoicing peals !

Towards the close of the century, travelling improved in Scotland, but it was still attended with great difficulty in some parts. Four miles of one of the best post-roads in Scotland—namely, that between Edinburgh and Berwick—were described in a contemporary record of about this date as being in so ruinous a state, that passengers were afraid of their lives, “either by their coaches overturning, their horses stumbling, their carts breaking, or their loads casting, and the poor people with burdens on their backs sorely grieved and discouraged ;” moreover, “strangers do often exclaim thereat,” as well they might. A traveller in Scotland so late as 1688, commenting on the absence of stage or other coaches on most Scotch roads, says<sup>1</sup> that “this carriage of persons from place to place might be better spared were there opportunities and means for the speedier conveyance of business by letters.” He comments on the badness of the roads, and asks that they may be made fit for vehicles. Nothing can better show the difficulties attendant on locomotion of any sort in Scotland, than the fact that an agreement was entered into in 1678 to run a coach between Edinburgh and Glasgow to be drawn by six horses, the journey there and

<sup>1</sup> *A Short Account of Scotland.* London, 1702.



back to be performed in six days. The distance was only forty-four miles in each direction. This undertaking was soon abandoned as unprofitable, though over and above what he could make, the contractor was encouraged by "a subsidy of 200 merks" a year for five years from the Glasgow Corporation. "As the undertaking is arduous," say the magistrates, "we agree to give the said William Hume this sum," on his agreeing to run the coach for the period stated, "whether he have passengers or not, and the burghesses of Glasgow always to have the preference to the coach."

The reader who has perused the last few pages will now have some idea of the difficulties which stood in the way of efficient postal communication at the time to which they refer: possibly he may the more clearly comprehend some of the facts of the English history of that eventful century. But, at the same time, he must not suppose that there was any standing still at the Post-office. However much the modes of working, the means of communication, and the slow and unequal manner in which correspondence was distributed, may excite the scorn of the present generation, living in the days of cheap and quick postage, they must, nevertheless, agree with Lord Macaulay in considering that the postal system of the Stuarts was such as might have moved the envy and admiration of the polished nations of antiquity, or even of the contemporaries of our own Shakespeare and Raleigh.<sup>1</sup> In Cornwall, Lincolnshire, some parts of Wales, and amongst the hills and dales of Cumberland, Westmoreland, and Yorkshire, letters were certainly sent but once a week, and not always very regularly then; but in our larger towns they were delivered two or three times a week. Regularly every summer season the *London Gazette* contained a notice that letters would be sent daily to Tunbridge Wells, and somewhat subsequently the same privilege was extended to Bath, when that city was filled with pleasure-seekers in summer. There were daily mails to the Downs, two packets constantly sailing from Deal; two boats sailed between England and France, three to Holland, three to Ireland, and mails were sent at least once a week to all these places from London. "As a masterpiece of all these grand arrangements," says a contributor to the *Gentleman's*

<sup>1</sup> *History of England*, vol. i. p. 388.

*Magazine*, who describes the Post-office operations of the period, "established by the present Postmaster-General, he hath annexed and appropriated the market-towns so well to the respective postages, that there is no considerable one of them which hath not an easy and certain conveyance for the letters once a week. Further, though the number of letters missive was not at all considerable in our ancestors' days, yet it is now so prodigiously great (*and the meanest of people are so beginning to write in consequence*), that this office produces in money 60,000*l.* a year. Besides, letters are forwarded with more expedition, and at less charges, than in any foreign country. A whole sheet of paper goes eighty miles for twopence, two sheets for fourpence, *and one ounce of letter* for but eightpence, and that in so short a time, by night as well as by day, that every twenty-four hours the post goes 120 miles, and in five days an answer to a letter may be had from a place distant 200 miles from the writer!"



## CHAPTER VI.

## THE SETTLEMENT OF THE POST-OFFICE.

TEN years after the removal of Docwra from his office in connexion with the Penny Post, another rival to the Government department sprang up in the shape of a "Halfpenny Post." The arrangements of the new were nearly identical with those of Docwra's post, except that the charges, instead of a penny and twopence, were to be a halfpenny and penny respectively. The scheme, established at considerable expense by a Mr. Povey, soon attracted the attention of the Post-office authorities; hence the following advertisement in the *Gazette*, November, 1709: — "Whereas Charles Povey and divers traders and shopkeepers in and about the city of London, and several persons ringing bells (the invariable accompaniment of letter collecting), about the streets of the said city, have set up, employed, and for some time continued a foot-post for collecting and delivering letters, *under the name of the halfpenny carriage of letters*, contrary to the known laws of the kingdom and to the great prejudice of Her Majesty's revenue." The advertisement then went on to say that information had been laid in the Court of Exchequer against Povey and his "ringers of bells," to recover against each of them 100*l.* for the setting up of the post, and 5*l.* for the continuance of each offence after this notice. In order to intimidate the offenders, another advertisement appears in the *Gazette* soon afterwards, to the effect that one Eliz. Locker had been put upon her trial for ringing a hand bell and collecting letters at four different times, to be carried to the General Post-office, without authorization from the authorities; and that a verdict was given against her for 20*l.* for the four offences. Meanwhile, Povey's case is not so easily disposed of; he will listen to reason; if his post is not suppressed he will try to make some arrangements. With this

object he addresses the Lords of the Treasury<sup>1</sup> that if they will let his messengers gather in the letters, "such as pass between man and man," so far as the Penny Post goes, he would "give sufficient security to pay one-tenth part more to the Postmasters-General than what the Penny Post-office ever brought in." "Or otherwise, if they will permit the said Charles Povey to take to farm the Penny Post and the collecting of letters for the General Post-office, that your petitioner would give sufficient security to pay double the revenues of what the Penny Post at any time brought in in clear profit." He further tells their Lordships that he has made the same proposals, entering into full particulars, to the authorities at the Post-office; and that they had replied to him that they did "not reject any of his proposals, but thought not fit to enter upon any treaty till the question at law was decided." In the meantime, Povey prints publicly an account of his proposals, and part of the correspondence with the authorities, which circumstance does not assist the fulfilment of his designs. The Postmasters-General are asked their opinion on the whole matter, and they enter at length into an account of Povey's undertaking. The account contains some amusing items. When they heard first of this innovation, and before they had threatened him with an action at law through the columns of the *Gazette*, they wrote to him to desist from his undertaking, or they would cause him to be prosecuted. To this letter Povey returned a reply, that he could not think of being so unjust to himself as to lay down his undertaking at their mere demand; that his case was not like Mr. Dockwra's; "*neither did we live under such a constitution as he did.*" He explains his meaning: "When the Penny Post was set up it was an arbitrary Government and bribed judges," but he would now stand his trial and hope for better things. Then the Chiefs tell how they repeated several notices in the *Gazette* (which we have already given), upon which Povey "printed his case in a public newspaper entitled *General Remarks*," and wherein, "in a ridiculing and insulting manner, he insinuated that if we were concerned in composing the said notice we should be looked upon by all rational men as chargeable with the highest indiscretion." Further, waxing still more rude, Povey "affirmed that a

<sup>1</sup> *Treasury Letter Book*, 1705—1712.

trial in the Exchequer was all that he wanted, but he feared he should never be provoked to it, since it plainly appeared that if the law had been on our side we would never have published such an advertisement, filled with so many *bugbear expressions*." They comment upon his proposals; they refer to the spirit in which he has conducted the correspondence relating thereto; they tell how in negotiation he has tried to trip them up; and conclude that he is a dangerous and unsafe man to do business with. "We shall be ready," say they in conclusion, "to give encouragement to any proposal which, duly weighed, may appear to be of advantage to the revenue; but as Mr. Povey set up his halfpenny carriage, and has continued it for several months after notice given him as aforesaid, and information exhibited against him; and he having insisted upon what he calls his right, and arraigning a former verdict obtained in the like case, we are humbly of opinion that it is not advisable to enter into any treaty with him upon his proposals till the matter be decided by law." The result of the lawsuit was, that Povey was beaten and cast in costs, and his posts were put down.

In 1710, the acts relating to the Post-office were completely remodelled, and the establishment put on an entirely fresh basis. The statutes passed in previous reigns were all repealed, and the statute of Anne c. 10, was substituted in their place; the latter remaining in force until 1837. The preamble of the Act just mentioned sets forth, that a Post-office for England was established by Charles II. and a Post-office for Scotland by William III., but that it is now desirable since the two countries are united, that the two offices should be united under one head. Also that packet boats have been for some time established between England and the West Indies, and the mainland of North America, and that more might be settled if only proper arrangements were made "at the different places to which the packet boats are assigned." It is further deemed necessary that the existing rates of postage should be altered; that "with little burthen to the subject some may be increased" and other new rates granted, "which additional and new rates," it is added, "may in some measure enable Her Majesty to carry on and furnish the present war." Suitable powers are also needed for the better collecting of such rates, as well as provision for

preventing the illegal trade carried on by "private posts, carriers, higlers, watermen, drivers of stage-coaches, and other persons, and other frauds to which the revenue is liable."

As these alterations and various improvements cannot be well and properly made without a new Act for the Post-office, the statutes embodied in 12 Charles II. and the statutes referring to the Scotch Post-office passed in the reign of William and Mary, entitled "An Act anent the Post-office," and every article, clause, and thing therein, are now declared repealed, and the statute of 9 Anne c. 10, called "An Act for establishing a General Post-office in all Her Majesty's dominions, and for settling a weekly sum out of the revenue thereof for the service of the war, and other Her Majesty's occasions," is substituted. This Act, which remained in force so long, and may be said to have been the foundation for all subsequent legislation on the subject, deserves special and detailed notice.

1. By its provisions a General Post and Letter-office is established within the City of London, "from whence all letters and packets whatsoever may be with speed and expedition sent into any part of the kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, to North America and the West Indies, or any other of Her Majesty's dominions, or any country or kingdom beyond the seas," and "at which office all returns and answers may be likewise received." For the better "managing, ordering, collecting, and improving the revenue," and also for the better "computing and settling the rates of letters according to distance, a chief office is established in Edinburgh, one in Dublin, one at New York, and other chief offices in convenient places in Her Majesty's colonies of America, and one in the islands of the West Indies, called the Leeward Islands."

2. The whole of these chief offices shall be "under the control of an officer who shall be appointed by the Queen's Majesty, her heirs and successors, to be made and constituted by letters patent under the Great Seal, by the name and style of Her Majesty's *Postmaster-General*." "The Postmaster-General shall appoint deputies for the chief offices in the places named above, and he, they, and their servants and agents, and no other person or persons whatsoever, shall from time to time, and at all times, have the receiving, taking up, ordering, despatching, sending

post with all speed, carrying and delivering of all letters and packets whatsoever." The only exceptions to this clause must be—<sup>1</sup>

(a) When common known carriers bear letters concerning the goods which they are conveying, and which letters are delivered with the goods without any further hire or reward, or other profit or advantage.

(b) When merchants or master-owners of ships send letters in ships concerning the cargoes of such ships, and delivered with them under the self-same circumstances.

(c) Letters concerning commissions or the returns thereof, affidavits, writs, process or proceeding, or returns thereof, issuing out of any court of justice.

(d) Any letter or letters sent by any private friend or friends in their way of journey or travel.

3. The Postmaster-General, and no other person or persons whatsoever, shall prepare and provide horses or furniture to let out on hire to persons riding post on any of Her Majesty's post-roads, under penalty of 100*l.* per week, or 5*l.* for each offence.<sup>2</sup> The rates of charge for riding post are settled as follows:—The hire of a post-horse shall be henceforth 3*d.* a mile, and 4*d.* a mile for a person riding as guide for every stage. Luggage to the weight of 80 pounds allowed, the guide to carry it with him on his horse.

4. The rates of postage under the present Act are settled.

	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>
For any single letter or piece of paper to any place in		
England not exceeding 80 miles . . . . .	0	3
„ double letter . . . . .	0	6
„ packet of writs, deeds, &c. per ounce . . . . .	1	0
„ single letter, &c. exceeding 80 miles, or as far north		
as the town of Berwick . . . . .	0	4
„ double letter . . . . .	0	8
„ packet, per ounce . . . . .	1	4
From London to Edinburgh and all places in Scotland south		
of Edinburgh, per single letter . . . . .	0	6
„ „ double letter . . . . .	1	0
„ „ packets, per ounce . . . . .	2	0

<sup>1</sup> These exceptions were again made in the Act 1 Vic. c. 33. s. 2, and still remain the law.

<sup>2</sup> This clause was repealed in the reign of George II.

The other Scotch posts were calculated from Edinburgh, and charged according to the distance as in England.

	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>
From London to Dublin, single letter . . . . .	0	6
"    "    double letter . . . . .	1	0
"    "    packets, per ounce . . . . .	2	0

From Dublin to any Irish town the charge was according to distance, at the English rate.

Any letter from any part of Her Majesty's dominions for London would be delivered free by the Penny Post, and if directed to places within a circuit of ten miles from the General Post-office, on payment of an extra penny over and above the proper rate of postage.

	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>
The postage of a single letter to France was . . . . .	0	10
"    "    Spain . . . . .	1	6
"    "    Italy . . . . .	1	3
"    "    Turkey . . . . .	1	3
"    "    Germany, Denmark . . . . .	1	0
"    "    Sweden . . . . .	1	0
"    "    from London to New York . . . . .	1	0

Other rates were charged to other parts of the American continent, according to the distance from New York, at something less than the English rate.

5. The principal deputy postmasters are empowered to erect *cross-posts* or stages, so that all parts of the country may have equal advantage as far as practicable, but only in cases where the postmasters are assured that such erections will be for "the better maintenance of trade and commerce, and mutual correspondence."

6. A survey of all the post-roads shall be made, so that the distances between any place and the chief office in each country "shall be settled by the same measure and standard." These surveys must be made regularly, "as necessity sheweth;" and when finished, the distances must be fairly shown by "*books of surveys*," one of which must be kept in each of the head offices, and by each of the surveyors themselves. The surveyors who shall be appointed and authorized to measure the distances



must swear to perform the same to the best of their skill and judgment.<sup>1</sup>

7. Letters may be brought from abroad by private ship, but must be delivered at once into the hands of the deputy postmasters at the respective ports, who will pay the master of such ship a penny for every letter which he may thus deliver up to them. It is hoped that, by these arrangements, merchants will not suffer as they had previously done, by having their letters "imbezilled or long detained, when they had been given into the charge of ignorant and loose hands, that understandeth not the ways and means of speedy conveyance and proper deliverance, to the great prejudice of the affairs of merchants and others."

8. The Postmaster-General and the deputy postmasters must qualify themselves, if they have not already done so, by receiving the *sacrament* according to the usage of the Church of England; taking, making, and subscribing the test, and the oaths of allegiance, supremacy, and adjuration. It is also decided that the Post-office officials must not meddle with elections for members of Parliament. The officers of the Post-office must also qualify themselves for the duties of their office by observing and following such orders, rules, directions, and instructions, concerning the settlements of the posts and stages, and the management of post-horses, and the horsing of all persons riding by royal warrant, as Her Majesty shall see fit from time to time to make and ordain.

A short proviso follows concerning the time-honoured privileges of the two English Universities, and guaranteeing the same; and then we come to an arrangement for the attainment of which object, it would appear (almost exclusively), the Post-office was remodelled in the manner we have shown.

9. "Towards the establishment of a good, sure, and lasting fund, in order to raise a present supply of money for carrying on the war, be it enacted that from the present time, and during the whole term of thirty-two years, the full, clear, and entire weekly sum of 700*l.*, out of the duties and revenues of the Post-office,

<sup>1</sup> The office of Post-office Surveyor, of which we here see the origin, still exists (though the officers now so designated have very different duties) among the most responsible and lucrative appointments in the Department.

shall be paid by the Postmaster-General into the receipts of the Exchequer on the Tuesday of every week."

Whatever else was arranged permanently, the increased rates of postage were only meant to be temporary; for at the end of thirty-two years it was provided that the old rates shall be resorted to. The clause was simply inserted as a war measure, for the purpose of raising revenue; but we shall see that, so far from returning to the old postages, fresh burdens were imposed at the end of that period and from time to time.<sup>1</sup>

Of the internal arrangements of the Post-office up to this period, we have already had several glimpses. The Postmaster-General did not always change with the Government. The "Board" was constituted something like the boards of management in the Customs and the Excise; perhaps the position and duties are better represented in the secretarial staff of the present day. The Secretary of the Post-office was then, however, merely a kind of principal clerk. The "grant of Postmaster-General" was set forth to be "determined only by the will or on the demise of the sovereign." Queen Anne granted the office to the same chiefs who had been appointed by William III. Of the two Postmasters-General referred to, we have more than once spoken.<sup>2</sup> The time, however, has now arrived when we may speak of them and the establishment they controlled so ably with more minuteness of detail. When Queen Anne ascended the throne, the chiefs had grown experienced; they were laborious, and most exact. Ever obedient in language and general tone to the Treasury Commissioners, or to the Lord High Treasurer when that office was not in commission—to one or other of which each detail of expenditure had to be submitted—they were very strict in exacting the most particular and circum-

<sup>1</sup> "There cannot be devised," says Blackstone, "a more eligible method than this of raising money upon the subject; for therein both the Government and the people find a mutual benefit. The Government requires a large revenue, and the people do their business with greater ease, expedition, and cheapness than they would be able to do if no such tax existed.—*Com.* vol. i. p. 324.

<sup>2</sup> Sir Robert Cotton and Thomas Frankland, Esq. succeeded Major, afterwards Sir John Wildman in 1690. Why two chiefs were appointed in place of one is not clear. In the writ of Privy Seal, dated March 1st, 1699, no mention is made of the fact that there had been but one previously. The old wording of the grant is preserved, and the salary is divided between them. Subsequently, each chief drew 1,000*l.* salary.

stantial obedience from those under their control. Sir Robert Cotton was a grandnephew of the famous founder of the Cottonian Library in the British Museum, and one of the band who, with Sir John Eliot for leader, made the first stand against the encroachments of Charles I. As the valuable library of Cottonian MSS. was considerably augmented by the descendants of the founder before it was presented to the nation, we might reasonably assume, if we had no other data, that the senior Postmaster-General was a man of cultivated tastes. Frankland was a Yorkshire squire of good estate, who, most probably for his services at the Post-office, acquired a baronetcy on the accession of Queen Anne. This baronetcy has passed down to Sir Thomas's descendants, who still live on a fine estate near Thirsk, in the North Riding of Yorkshire. We may as well say here that Sir Robert Cotton died in 1708, when a new patent was granted, and Frankland was joined by John Evelyn, Esq. afterwards Sir John.<sup>1</sup> The Postmasters-General might be members of either House of Parliament, though it was several years subsequently before a peer was appointed to the office. The chiefs of whom we are speaking were keen electioneers, though they figured little in Parliament. Sir Thomas sat for his pocket borough of Thirsk during several sessions. Sir Robert does not seem to have had a pocket borough, or much estate of any kind. In 1702<sup>2</sup> they write to the Treasury to be relieved of their postal duties; they want to get into the country "to secure our interests, that we may be further capable of serving Her Majesty," who had just succeeded to the throne. Soon after this, a packet contractor complained to the Lord Treasurer that the chiefs at the Post-office had let a contract to some other persons, though he had offered to do the work on a much lower tender, because one of them (Cotton) expected parliamentary support from two men who had been thus favoured. The Postmasters-General indignantly spurn the accusation, and indeed prove its maliciousness by showing that the men had neither

<sup>1</sup> Probably a relative of the famous diarist, but we have failed to establish the point. He was certainly no relative of the Sir John Evelyn of Surrey, and of the Long Parliament. If belonging to the diarist's family, his acquaintance with Sir Stephen Fox, then of the Treasury, the progenitor of the noble house of Holland, will sufficiently account for the appointment.

<sup>2</sup> *Treasury Letter Book*, 1699—1705.

votes themselves nor any influence in obtaining them.<sup>1</sup> The duties of the chiefs were exceedingly laborious, and most curiously varied; the constant attention and the unseasonable hours which they were required to devote to them—letters from them to their agents or other subordinates bearing date from all hours of the night as well as day—prove them to have been difficult and onerous. In a petition to the Treasury, the Secretary of the Post-office asks for more remuneration (having but 100*l.* a year), and states that he is required “to give constant attendance at the Board six days a week, the Board sitting many hours every post-morning and night,” while during the interval he had to give effect to the orders of his chiefs, and see that the business was properly transacted. His salary, we may add, was doubled on the representation of the Postmasters-General, who described how “immensely of late the work of the office had increased.” Not the lightest portion of their work was their correspondence with the Treasury Lords, who had to be consulted on every proposal, and who constantly required the minutest information on everything submitted. On a change of Government their work was increased by the ignorance of the inexperienced hands placed over them; they had to explain over and over again the technical arrangement of the office before the new Lords could comprehend the items in the accounts which they were required to pass. Thus the Treasury Lords would send a string of questions arising out of an account furnished in regular order by the Post-office officials, and would require categorical answers to the same. If the details could not be brought down to the apprehension of their lordships the answers would be sent back like debased currency to be exchanged for better. Thus from a string of such questions we take the following at random:—“How comes it to pass that the queen’s letters come to 16,234*l.* and the members’ letters to 328*l.*? This to be explained.” “Query, If Postmasters-General have power to allow salaries to agents of packet boats, *ad libitum*, or whether there be any establishment for them.” “Was any estimate for 1,300*l.* for the new buildings laid before the Treasury, and is there any warrant for the allowance thereof?” These examples, which are only given

<sup>1</sup> *Treasury Letter Book*, 1699—1705.

to show our meaning, show also how tightly the Executive held the purse strings. The queries were, however, quite easily and satisfactorily answered. The Postmasters-General had other occasions of correspondence with the Lords of the Treasury. The latter were, at this period especially, literally overwhelmed with petitions from those who were in debt to the Crown, or from those who had, or thought they had, any grievance to complain of. Invariably these memorials were forwarded to the Post-office whenever they concerned that department, and the authorities were required to investigate and report upon the circumstances of each case. While nothing could better show their business-like shrewdness than some of these reports, nothing they had to do can have been attended with so much labour. Most of the petitions are urgent requests that debts might be reduced or altogether forgiven, or that execution, which had already been ordered, might be stayed. The recommendations made with regard to some are curious. No debt by the advice of these men is entirely remitted, except there is absolutely no chance of obtaining it either from the persons themselves or those who have been security for them; very seldom is it that they do not recommend a portion should be remitted as an encouragement to the debtors to pay the rest. Occasionally the motive for such advice is neither so kind nor so honourable as it might have been. In one case they wind up their report as follows:—"The petitioner's wife informs us that by the kindness and contribution of his friends he will be enabled to pay 30 guineas provided the aforesaid debt of 73*l.* may be discharged; if your Lordships in compassion of his own and his family's circumstances shall think fit to accept of this proposal, we believe it will not only be an act of great charity, *but as much as can be recovered by law.*" In another more important case Sir Alexander Bruce asks that some debts, owing by deputy-postmasters in Scotland, may be ceded over to him as payment of certain claims he has upon the Crown. With regard to this proposal the Postmasters-General say that they know nothing about the sums said to be owing to Bruce, and "therefore we can say nothing of these particulars, as we are altogether strangers;" but they *do* know about the debts owing to them, and have tried hard enough to get them in.

Knowing what they do, they heartily agree to Sir A. Bruce's proposals, and seem in their letter as if they would like to wish him success in his attempt to get his own in this tortuous way. The reason they assign for concluding to accept the proposal may be well understood in the present day by those in the one country who have money suits in the other: "Having met," say they, "with so many difficulties and interruptions in the process against them by the *dilatory and perplexing proceedings of the law of Scotland*, by which obstructions we may not have been able to bring the matters to any manner of issue, we are humbly of opinion that if he (Bruce) have the debts, he may be able when in Scotland himself, being acquainted with the law there, to recover more than what at this distance we can expect to recover." In one more case they recommend a reduction because "it may be more advantageous considering all the circumstances of the case than to proceed at law." After this let no one say that our Postmasters-General were not wise in their generation. Nor were they without a kind of dry humour, as when one person claimed special consideration from the fact of his forefathers having suffered for and under the Stuart kings, they begin their report by fearing too many might present such claims; they will keep to their proper province, however, "and suppose it cannot be expected of us that we should be able to give any account of Mr. Blackhall's father and grandfather's sufferings for King Charles I.!"

All letters and mandates issuing from the Post-office bore the signatures of both the chiefs: but Mr. Scudamore, than whom no one is more entitled to speak on this subject, as no one has more patiently investigated the records of the period, thinks it probable that the work of the office was equitably divided between the two gentlemen, the one taking charge principally of the inland business, while the other managed the packets. The duties of the latter department were much more onerous than might be supposed, and very different indeed from the management under present arrangements. The service was undeveloped, and contracts for the work had just begun to be thought of: hence the Post-office officials had to build packets as well as furnish and man them; when the ships were done work they had to dispose of them; in times of war they had to

arm them. Amongst the records which survive of the Post-office none are more full nor none more interesting than those which relate to the infancy and growth of the English packet-service—a service which is now the best and most extensive, beyond all proportion, in the world. Upon those curious records we cannot draw in this volume to any great extent, but hope to treat the subject in all its bearings in a separate publication. All we venture upon now is so much as will illustrate the character of the Post-office chiefs, and the duties which they were required to perform. This service, indeed, seems to have given the Postmasters-General great and constant anxiety. The packets were then so much at the mercy of the elements; the men on board were, on account of their semi-official character, so much more difficult to control—and postal affairs at all times required peremptory control if all must go on well; while French and other privateers gave so much trouble, that we can fancy few duties less pleasant or less enviable. The packet-boats were required to fight on occasion serving or demanding: hence in war times they were armed in some sort as vessels of war. The Postmasters-General were required to see to it that they went forth with sufficient stores and men, and so during the continuance of strife their duties never flagged and their energies were continually on the stretch. That this is no exaggerated picture of the state of things will be apparent to all who have looked into the records, and the sad plaintiveness of some of their letters puts the matter beyond a doubt. “We are very uneasy,” say they to one agent, “and shall be till we hear the stores are safely arrived with you, which we impatiently wish.” “We are concerned,” say they to another, and many letters are begun with the same words, “to find the letters brought by your boat (one from the West Indies) *to be so consumed by the rats*, that we cannot find out to whom they belong.” Seeing this we cannot but sympathise in their joys, as we try to do with their manifold sorrows, when they tell one of their captains that his “letter of the 4th was very welcome after our many apprehensions of some misfortune having happened to the expedition.” Another letter to their agent at Harwich is evidently disciplinary, and runs as follows:—

"Mr. EDISBURY,—The woman whose complaint we herewith send you, having given us much trouble upon the same, we desire you will enquire into the same and see justice done her, believing she may have had her brandy stole from her by the sailors.

"We are, your affectionate friends,

"R. C. T. F."

Knowing their men, they thought it only too probable that the brandy had gone in the way indicated. It is to be hoped that the woman would be compensated for her loss, as the liquor itself would be lost beyond all redemption. In another letter they scold an agent (always affectionately) because he "had not provided a sufficiency of pork and beef for the prince (Prince George of Denmark in all probability); in another, because he had bought powder at Falmouth that would have been so much cheaper in London." Then in other cases they act as guardians of morality and loyalty, suspending an agent because he "had stirred up a mutiny between the captain and his men, which was unhandsome conduct in him," and bringing Captain Clies to trial in another case, inasmuch as he had "spoken words reflecting on the Royal family" which they "took particular unkind of him." Another captain is in difficulties with his men, and they try their hands as peacemakers. Their plans succeed temporarily, but soon afterwards, Captain Chennal is again in hot water. "We are concerned to find," they write, "such differences among persons employed under us, but we do think the best way to compose them is to advise everyone to mind his proper business and duty. We do think you might keep all your officers and sailors to strict duty without so *rugged a treatment*. As we are desirous of good discipline, so also are we of good agreement." Thus these shrewd, active, and anxious men pursued their calling, managing their office with scrupulous care and fidelity, and earning the respect of posterity as well as of those who knew them.<sup>1</sup>

This sole control over the resources of the packet-service

<sup>1</sup> In entering into many of these details we have been considerably indebted to the investigations of Mr. Scudamore, now Assistant-secretary of the Post-office (see *Appendix* to the Postmaster General's *First Report*, pp. 51—62). This able and respected public servant, equally shrewd and successful in everything he takes in hand, seems to have been the first to perceive the value and interest attaching to the early records of this department, and to have endeavoured to preserve them from oblivion.



readily explains much in the history of the *franking system* which otherwise were unintelligible. The Treasury warrants of that day franked the strangest commodities, as the following list of a few items extracted by Mr. Scudamore from the *Records* will sufficiently prove:—

“Imprimis:—Fifteen couple of hounds going to the King of the Romans with a free pass.

Item:—Some parcels of cloths for the clothing colonels in my Lord North's and my Lord Grey's regiments.

Item:—Two maid servants going as laundresses to my Lord Ambassador Methuen.

Item:—Dr. Crichton carrying with him a cow and divers other necessaries.

Item:—Three suits of cloths for some nobleman's lady at the Court of Portugal.

Item:—A box containing three pounds of tea, sent as a present from my Lady Arlington, to the Queen Dowager of England, at Lisbon.

Item:—One parcel of lace, to be made use of in clothing Duke Schomberg's regiment.

Item:—Two bales of stockings for the use (P) of the Ambassador to the Crown of Portugal.

Item:—A box of medicines for my Lord Galway in Portugal.

Item:—A deal case with four fitches of bacon for Mr. Pennington, of Rotterdam.”

It is necessary that we should turn back to the origin of the franking system, and we may as well deal with the whole question at the same time. A committee of the House of Commons, which sat in the year 1735, reported that “the privilege of franking letters by the knights, &c. chosen to represent the Commons in Parliament, began with the creating of a Post-office by Act of Parliament.” The proviso which secured this privilege to members cannot now be otherwise regarded than as a propitiatory clause to induce the unanimous approval of the general Bill for the establishment of the Post-office. The account of the discussion of the franking clause is like an oasis in the desert of blue-book literature, and makes amusing what is nothing but a dry revenue discussion.<sup>1</sup> Sir Walter Earle proposed that “members' letters should come and go free during the time of their sittings.” Sir Heneage Finch (afterwards Lord Chancellor Finch)

<sup>1</sup> Cobbett's *Parliamentary History*, vol. ix.

said, indignantly, "It is a *poor mendicant* proviso, and below the honour of the House." Notwithstanding this outburst, many members spoke in favour of the clause, Sir George Downing and Mr. Boscawen among the number, while Serjeant Charlton told the House that "letters for counsel went free." The question was being carried on the wings of popular feeling, when an unexpected difficulty arose with the Speaker, Sir Harbottle Grimstone, who, when the question was called, refused for some time to put it, saying he "felt ashamed of it." The proviso was eventually put and carried by a large majority. When the Post-office Bill, with its franking privileges, was sent up to the Lords, they threw out the clause, ostensibly for the same reason which had actuated the minority in the Commons in opposing it, but really, as it was confessed some years later, because there was no provision made in the Bill that the "Lords' own letters should pass free." A few years afterwards this important omission was supplied, and both Houses had the privilege guaranteed to them.

We have seen what curious consignments of goods were made under Government franks in connexion with the packet service. In the Inland Office parcels and packets scarcely more of the nature of letters passed through the post by a stretch of the privilege in question.<sup>1</sup> With regard to letters, the first enactment set forth that any member of Parliament should send and receive all his letters free of postage during the sittings of the Houses. Then the privilege was granted without restrictions of any kind, either as to time or the nature of the correspondence.

<sup>1</sup> Sir Walter Scott used to tell the following, which for many reasons is too good not to give: "One morning," says he, "I opened a huge lump of a despatch without looking at the address, never doubting but that it had travelled under some omnipotent frank, like the First Lord of the Admiralty's, when, lo and behold! the contents proved to be a MS. play, by a young lady of New York, who kindly requested me to read and correct it, equip it with prologue and epilogue, procure for it a good reception from the manager of Drury Lane, and make Murray or Constable bleed handsomely for the copyright! On inspecting the cover, I found that I had been charged upwards of 5*l.* for the postage. This was bad enough, but seeing no help, I groaned and submitted. A fortnight after another packet of the same formidable bulk arrived, and I was absent enough again to break the seal without examination. Conceive my horror when out jumped again the same identical tragedy of the *Cherokee Indians*, with an epistle from the authoress stating that, as the winds had been so boisterous, she feared the first packet had foundered, and had thought it best to send me a duplicate!"

It was soon found, however, that too much liberty was allowed, and that this arrangement led to abuses of many forms. In 1705, Queen Anne issued a warrant, signed by Godolphin, Lord High Treasurer, which curtailed the power of members—the warrant to the Postmasters-General running as follows:—<sup>1</sup>

“Our will and pleasure is, and we do hereby require and command, that the members of both our Houses of Parliament, during the respective sessions, and for forty days before and forty days after every session, be permitted to send and receive free any letters or packets which ought to be paid, until we shall signify our pleasure to the contrary, and so as such letters or packets to be franked do not exceed two ounces in weight. We do also require you to make our pleasure known to the members of both Houses, that, for the preventing the abuses which (we are informed) have been frequently practised by divers persons who, not being members of either House themselves, have presumed to endorse upon their letters the names of such as were, as also to direct their letters to members of Parliament when at the same time such letters do not really belong to or concern these members, we do expect that the members of both Houses do constantly endorse their names on their own letters with their own handwriting, and that they do not suffer any letters whatsoever than such as concern themselves to pass under their frank, cover, or direction to the diminution and prejudice of our revenue.”

In 1763 the abuses complained of had not only not abated, but considerably increased. The forging of members' franks, because so lucrative, became so general, that an investigation was ordered; when, as one fact among many then brought to light, it was found that one man had, in the course of five months, counterfeited 1,200 dozens of them, and was rapidly enriching himself at His Majesty's expense. Owing to circumstances such as these, the value of franked correspondence went on augmenting during the whole of the eighteenth century. In 1716 the worth of State letters and franked letters amounted together to 27,087*l*. In 1763, the money which would have been paid on letters franked by members alone amounted to the enormous sum of 170,000*l*.!

In the early part of the century the franked correspondence, especially that known as “State's letters,” gave the Postmasters-General great trouble. Under the authority of the king, the principal Government officers were allowed to send their letters free, if the covers were endorsed with the names of the respec-

<sup>1</sup> *Treasury Letter Book, 1704—1709.*

tive heads of departments. Thanks to the vigilance of the Post-office chiefs, we get some curious glimpses of the easy morals of the official mind of their day. The high State officer, under pretence of "His Majesty's Service," might send under his frank anything he chose, but the Postmasters-General cannot stand a traffic in deception among the subordinates, and they pounce upon them when they dare, and when they have the opportunity, very severely. From the following letter it would appear that an accident originally revealed sharp practices in the office of the Duke of Queensberry and Dover, who was, in 1709, the English secretary for Scotland. The Postmasters-General tell the duke that they had long suspected that private letters were conveyed between Edinburgh and London among the official correspondence, and they now produce conclusive evidence, as follows :—

"The packet from Edinburgh which came this day directed to Mr. Montgomery, your grace's secretary, being broke open by rubbing in the mail, and the letters thereby become loose, has given us an opportunity of observing that, besides several letters directed to your grace, your secretary, and the clerks in the office, there came enclosed in the cover of the said packet so many letters directed to tradesmen and private persons in London and Westminster, as that the postage amounts to 4*l.* 15*s.* and we have reason to believe that every post the like or a greater number of letters are sent under the cover of the secretary's packet."

They ask the duke to take steps in the matter, that such an abuse may not continue. About the same time a similar letter is sent to the Board of Ordnance; but the following to Mr. Blaithwaite, long the Secretary for War, is of its kind unique. They seem to have addressed the War Secretary in a previous letter, but not to have spoken with their usual plainness, inasmuch as an explanation or more explicitness is desired, and Mr. Blaithwaite gets it with a vengeance :—

"The occasion of our letter of the 24th past was upon our observing that there were each post so many letters signed with your name which amounted to about 5*l.* which we apprehended might arise so high by several gentlemen desiring to send their letters under your cover. As we were desirous to hinder the lessening of the revenue, so we did not know but that our taking notice of it might give some answer to many importunities which you could not otherwise so easily avoid. We cannot deny but that this has been too much a practice in all times, but we are sure you will not blame us for wishing it were amended, being so very prejudicial to His Majesty's

revenue under our management; and you will be of the same opinion when we tell you that in each Holland mail those which are commonly called 'State Letters,' amount to between 20*l.* and 30*l.* most of which we can scarce suppose to be intelligence relating to His Majesty's business."

Shrewd and skilful diplomatists, King William's postal revenue was surely safe in their keeping.

In the year 1764, Parliament enacted that no letter should pass free through the Post-office unless the whole address was in the member's own handwriting, and his signature attached likewise. Even these precautions, though lessening the frauds of forgery, were not sufficient to meet the evil, as fresh regulations were thought necessary in 1784. This time it was ordered that all franks should be dated, the month to be given in full; and further, that the letters should be posted on the date given. In 1795 it was ordered that franked letters were only to carry one ounce, and were only to pass free when posted within twenty miles of the place where the member concerned was on that or the preceding day. Further, no more than ten letters could be sent, or more than fifteen received, by one person in one day. From that time, 1795, to the date of penny postage the quantity of franked letters increased enormously, and the abuses increased with them, yet no further change was made in the law. Members throughout the country signed huge packets of covers at once, and supplied them to friends and adherents in large quantities. Sometimes they were sold. They have been known to have been given to servants in lieu of wages, the servants selling them again in the ordinary way of business. In 1838, the number of franks which actually passed through the Post-office was estimated at seven millions, which number when reduced to the standard of *single* letters amounted to above 30 per cent. of the whole number of letters transmitted by post. The average weight of an official frank was about two ounces; that of a parliamentary frank over half an ounce; whilst an ordinary letter averaged but three-tenths of an ounce. Had the parliamentary and official franks of 1838 been liable to the regular charge, and that settled according to weight, as at present, these letters alone would have added nearly a *million* sterling to the Post-office revenue of that year!

We will close this chapter with a brief account of the staff of

the Post-office and the expenses of management at the time to which we have now carried this history—viz. to the end of the reign of Queen Anne. With the new dynasty we find a new management at the Post-office, and many important changes which require separate and special treatment.

	£	s.	d.
The gross revenue of the Post-office in the year 1715 amounted to . . . . .	182,415	8	6
Then by Expenses of Management . . . . .	63,065	11	6
By State's Letters and Members' Franks . . . . .	23,322	4	8
By Money paid into the Exchequer, at 700 <i>l.</i> per week . . . . .	36,400	0	0
	£123,387	16	2
Leaving as "net produce" . . . . .	59,027	12	4
Which sum, if added to the sum of money paid into the Exchequer, gives a clear net revenue for the year 1715 of . . . . .	95,427	12	4

There were then two Postmasters-General, with a salary of 1,000*l.* each per annum; they had a secretary, with 200*l.* and he was assisted by a clerk, with 60*l.* There were four chief officers in the Inland Office—an Accountant-General, with a salary of 300*l.*; a Receiver-General, also with 300*l.*; a Controller, with 200*l.*; and a Solicitor, with 200*l.* The staff of clerks consisted of seven for the different roads—Chester, North, West, Bristol, Yarmouth, Kent, and Kent Night-Roads. Each of the clerks had salaries of 60*l.* per annum, and all but the last-named had assistants or sorters, with 55*l.* per annum. Thirteen clerks were engaged in other duties, either as alphabet-keepers, window-men, or clerks to the chief officers, at salaries of 60*l.* and 50*l.* per annum. The Foreign Office, which was a separate establishment, included a Controller, with 150*l.* a year; an alphabet-keeper, with 100*l.*; and six clerks, at 50*l.* each. The following list of letter-receivers we quote entire :—

	£	s.	d.
Richard Saye, that takes letters in at Gray's Inn Gate, per annum . . . . .	16	0	0
E. Sanger, at Temple Bar . . . . .	27	0	0
G. Luce, at Westminster . . . . .	20	0	0

	£	s.	d.
F. Lovell, at St. James's . . . . .	10	0	0
John Smith, at Covent Garden . . . . .	13	6	8
R. Greswell, at East Smithfield . . . . .	15	0	0
Mrs. Wilkinson, at Ratcliff Cross . . . . .	15	0	0
Mrs. Eaton, at Wapping . . . . .	15	0	0
James Eldridge, in Holbourn . . . . .	6	0	0
John Loyd, in the Strand . . . . .	12	0	0
Edward Jeffries, in Bloomsbury Market . . . . .	8	0	0
William Symonds, at Fleet Ditch . . . . .	5	0	0
Three letter bringers "who bring letters from Westminster, Pell Mell, and Gray's Inn, get among them," per annum <sup>1</sup> . . . . .	37	0	0

Six foreign letter-carriers, at sixteen shillings a week, and sixty-six inland letter-carriers, at eleven shillings a week, with a few porters and minor officers, make up the London establishment of 1715. Thus the London office of that date was correctly managed with a staff which, including letter-carriers, did not amount to so many as the number of officers now employed at the separate money order establishment in Aldersgate Street; and the entire expenses of management for the London office for that year did not amount to so much as is now paid *in a week* to the clerks of that office alone.<sup>2</sup> As the salaries of the whole of the deputy postmasters in England and Wales amounted to less than 10,000*l.* annually, we may assume that the greatest portion of the expenses of management, or nearly 34,000*l.* went to defray the cost of the Mail Packet Service.

<sup>1</sup> These men, it may be remembered, the authorities appointed because the receivers were wont to get "indigent persons" to do the duty, at even a cheaper rate!

<sup>2</sup> We must again call attention to the fact that the whole of these sums may be considered as at least equivalent to three times the amount in the money of the present day, *i.e.* regarding the cost of living, and the value of estates.

## CHAPTER VII.

RALPH ALLEN AND CROSS POSTS IN ENGLAND, AND JAMES  
ANDERSON AND HORSE POSTS IN SCOTLAND.

1715 TO 1760.

IN 1715, Frankland and Evelyn were succeeded at the Post-office by Lord Cornwallis and James Craggs, Esq. sen. the Whigs having again come into power. Cornwallis had previously occupied a seat at the Board of Admiralty; Craggs some fifty years before had begun life as a barber, and was subsequently a footman in the service of the Duchess of Cleveland. Craggs was a man of undoubted ability, and both he and his son<sup>1</sup> were very friendly with Pope, who frequently eulogized them in his verse. For example, he wrote of the elder as

“A soul as full of worth as void of pride,  
Which nothing seeks to shun or needs to hide.”

Craggs had a most prosperous career until he became involved in the South Sea scheme, and came to a terrible death by suicide in 1718. In his place at the Post-office he seems to have been most painstaking, active, and precise, and may be

<sup>1</sup> It was the son and not Craggs *Père* who succeeded Addison as Secretary of State, after the essayist's short and somewhat inglorious occupation of that high post. Our excuse for this error, into which we have fallen in our *First Edition*, is that father and son are very often confounded with one another, even by Lord Macaulay, owing to both filling high official positions at the same time. When the son became Secretary of State, the two friends coquetted in verse not much known.

POPE.

“Since my old friend is grown so great  
As to be Minister of State,  
I'm told, but 'tis not true, I hope,  
That Craggs will be ashamed of Pope.”

To which Craggs is said to have replied:—

“Alas! If I am such a creature  
To grow the worse for growing greater,  
Why, faith, in spite of all my brags,  
'Tis Pope must be ashamed of Craggs.”



said to have done Lord Cornwallis's duty as well as his own.<sup>1</sup> He wrote most of the letters, and accounts for his single signature by the constant expression, "My Lord Cornwallis being out of town." Their initiation of the cross-post system stamps their management as one of no ordinary character, while the care they took of all the various accounts, and the endeavour to carry out all the clauses in the Post-office Act of 1709—10, show their diligence and aptitude. "It appears to us," say they to the Treasury Lords, "that a further improvement in the revenue may be made, as well as a better and more commodious appointment of the posts in several places in this kingdom may be settled, for want of which we have very frequent complaints, and, as we conceive, not without very good grounds." Clerks and deputies have not sufficient checks upon their correctness; they underpay their subordinates, or don't pay them at all, "which must lead to frauds in the revenue;" and the postboys carry letters in their pockets; all which abuses might be remedied if several surveyors were to make continual journeys into the kingdom to examine accounts and superintend the management. The Act of 1710 gave the necessary powers, but the surveyors had not been continued after the post roads had been measured. The Treasury Lords agree to the appointment of six surveyors for the six principal post roads;<sup>2</sup> and though they seem to have been meant but for temporary employment, yet the institution of the cross-post system, to which we must now refer at greater length, made it necessary that at least three of them should be constantly engaged.

The system of cross-posts may be said to have been inaugurated by the late Postmasters-General, for in the early part of the century they established several bye-posts (one between Bristol and Exeter we have already referred to), which were very successful. They saw the necessity of a long cross-post between Bristol and Chester, and actually started it, but it not succeeding so rapidly as they imagined, and not being able to control its working at such a distance, they were reluctantly compelled to advise the Treasury Lords to give it up. In 1719, however, Ralph Allen appears, another, and perhaps the most fortunate of all the improvers of the Post-office. Mr. Allen

<sup>1</sup> *Treasury Letter Book*, 1715—1724.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

either was at that time, or previously had been—for we have failed to establish the fact—postmaster of Bath, a position of great importance among the then deputy-postmasters. He would doubtless be cognizant of the attempts made by the authorities to establish and perfect the cross-post between Bristol and Chester. Be that as it may, he was well aware of the defects in the existing system, and resolved upon undertaking the business himself (for farming different portions of country was not then unknown), if he could get the requisite authority, and make a reasonable bargain. The nature of the work which he proposed himself may be easily understood when the reader is informed that there was no direct postal intercommunication between such large towns in the interior of the country as Bristol and Birmingham, Birmingham and Manchester, but that London was the centre of the system, from which posts radiated, as it were, to all the important towns in the kingdom. Thus it happened that letters between country towns were carried by strangely circuitous routes ; for example, a letter from Cheltenham or Bath for Worcester or Birmingham required first to go to the metropolis, and then to be sent back again by the direct post-road, an arrangement which in those days of slow locomotion caused endless delays and inconvenience. Mr. Allen saw clearly, and he was almost the first to see it, that the more speedy the post was made, the more frequently people could send and get letters, the certain result would be a great multiplication of letters within the same time ; and that this multiplication of correspondence would not only make up for the reduced rates of letters sent so much shorter distances, but would materially augment the revenue. “Quickened and improved correspondence is the life of trade,” said Allen in his quaintly-written proposal to the Treasury Lords ; and it is fortunate for posterity that belief in this truism—at which that same posterity may be inclined in these days to laugh—was shared by the Government of the period. The Postmasters-General needed little convincing of the expediency of the method proposed by Mr. Allen to give the direct communication to certain provincial towns ; they had only given up the posts because they could not make them pay sufficiently ; they considered therefore that they ought only to be too glad to let Allen make a trial, seeing that

he proposed to do so at his own risk and cost. With this official recognition of the merits of the scheme, and the recommendation of the Post-office chiefs in its favour, the proposals met with no opposition from the Treasury. The Postmasters-General were instructed to prepare an agreement, and after it had been duly approved by Attorney-General Lechmere, it was signed by the parties concerned. This agreement, so important in itself, and so much more important in its bearings on the gradual rise of the Post-office to its present condition, we must here make the endeavour to give full enough to be understood, but so compressed as not to encroach unfairly on our space. The agreement, which covers nine or ten pages of the official letter-book of the period,<sup>1</sup> was signed on the 12th of April, 1720, and was to last for *seven* years.

(1) Mr. Allen undertakes to pay 6,000*l.* per annum, in quarterly payments, for the farm of the new posts that he proposes to erect. The entire cost of setting up post-offices and post-stages, where not established, to be defrayed by him ; and the salaries of the officers to be employed in new posts also to be paid by him. (2) He engages during seven years to farm the whole distance between Exeter and Chester, and all the towns between these places, and also the road between Bristol and Oxford, going by way of Bath, Wantage, and Abingdon, "and taking in all towns on or near that road." He further engages to carry and deliver letters along the whole of these roads at least three times a week. (3) He stipulates to keep horses always in readiness at the several stages for persons riding post or express, and only to demand the lawful charges ; also, that the post-boys to be employed by him shall ride five miles an hour.

In consideration of these engagements, Mr. Allen secures (4) The carriage or postage of all letters on any of his roads, according to the charges by law established. He agrees, however, to a proviso inserted here, that he will not meddle with other letters than his own, or those for towns belonging to roads not in his contract,—a special reference being made to the letters which may have passed through London, and known as "country letters." To the end that the authorities may see that these clauses have been duly attended to, they get Allen to engage to

<sup>1</sup> *Treasury Letter Book*, 1715—1724.

keep books at all his stages, entering there all his charges, costs, disbursements, and receipts, and transmitting a proper account from these entries to the General Post-office every six months ; not only so, but to keep these books always open to the inspection of such officers as the authorities may see fit to send into the country to examine them. (5) In conclusion, the Postmasters-General indemnify themselves against all loss from this contract.

Mr. Allen's contract was in abeyance for some months, in consequence of the change of Government, owing to the bursting of the great South Sea Bubble, in which not only the working Postmaster-General, Mr. Craggs, but the Premier (Sunderland) and the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Aislable) are supposed to have been deeply implicated. When, however, Mr. Carteret and Mr. G. Walpole (a relative of the new Premier) took office at the Post-office, they ratified the deed in all its particulars.

When the seven years had nearly expired, Mr. Allen addressed the Treasury on the subject of a renewal of the contract. Mr. Allen cannot engage to give a higher sum for the farm ; he shows how he has cleared but a little sum during the seven years, and how he has lain on anything but a bed of roses during that time. In his own words, he "has had to labour under a great expense by the opposition and perverseness of the officers who formerly sunk and embezzled this part of the revenue, and most of the people (he rather slyly added) still wait with earnest expectation for an end of the present lease, that they may again throw the business into its former disorder and confusion." Though he cannot offer more money for the contract, he proposes to extend the sphere of his operations. The Postmasters-General report upon his proposals ; they agree with him that he has been subject to all kinds of disturbance from those whose vested interests had suffered ; and they recommend that if Mr. Allen would engage to apply his system to the Kent and Yarmouth Roads, he should be allowed to renew his contract on the same terms. In consideration of his expenses, and the beneficial effects to the country which had followed from his existing posts, a similar agreement to the foregoing was made out and signed. We may as well here recount how Mr. Allen succeeded in inducing the Treasury to grant him seven different

leases of the cross-post farm in terms of seven years each ; that each application was accompanied with offers to extend his posts till they covered the whole country. When he had exhausted his resources in the way of extension of the posts, he began to offer inducements of a different nature. In his fourth application he offered that his posts should travel *six* instead of *three* times a week over his original roads. In his fifth agreement he engaged to send posts six times a week between London and Bristol, and London and Birmingham. In his seventh and last he stipulated that the posts between London and Nottingham, and London and Manchester, should travel each working day. In addition, however, we find he entered into an engagement to establish a supplementary post from London to Chester, going by way of Nantwich, and another from London to Shrewsbury, going through Wolverhampton. But we have not yet exhausted the list of his projects and expedients. At the commencement of each contract he engaged that his posts should not only not depreciate the value of the postage of "country letters," of which we have already spoken, but that the revenue from them should continue to increase. To this end, he guaranteed a certain amount of revenue from this source, and if that was not reached by the end of the year, he would make the amount up from his own funds. Each proposal contained a guarantee for a larger sum than the foregoing. In his sixth contract, he put the amount down at 18,000*l.* in his seventh at 18,500*l.* a year, and when we remember that this amount of postage is but for a small branch of operations, the result is a sure evidence of the general progress of postal business. We must, in passing, refer to one little circumstance in Allen's fifth application to the Treasury for a renewal of his lease. He modestly refers to the fact of the army under Prince Charles having come into England during his last contract, making sad havoc of his peaceful postal arrangements in the Midland and Lancashire districts, and he prays that in his further term he "may be spared from the dangers that may attend any new national calamities." The Postmasters-General tell the Treasury Lords that Mr. Allen's loss must have been considerable, by the "disorder into which his affairs were thrown by the effects of the late horrid and unnatural Rebellion," and therefore a clause was inserted in the

next agreement, providing against a fresh irruption of the Scotch Jacobites into England.

Mr. Allen died in 1764, and the cross-post system, which had become so gigantic as to be nearly unmanageable, was transferred to the care of the Post-office authorities themselves. It was with great trouble that the revenues of the two posts were gathered toward the last, so much so that the lapse of the new posts to the Crown establishment must have given satisfaction to the Government. It is true that the persons employed by Mr. Allen were, though paid by him, appointed by the Postmasters-General, and liable to be dismissed by them at will ; yet still the distinction between the different postages—that of the bye or cross posts belonging to Allen, while the general postage, and the postage of the “country letters,” belonged to the Government—was ever the vexed question, and one which led to continual disputes. The deputies, moreover, were known to hold the loosest notions on this subject, some of them preferring to appropriate the revenues of one or the other post rather than run the risk of mistakes in the matter ! It was one of the chief duties of the Surveyors of the Post-office, of whom there were now four (three paid by Mr. Allen, and one residing in London to advise the Postmasters-General in relation to the cross-posts, &c.), to visit each deputy-postmaster continually, to see that this distinction between the different postages was properly kept up. Sad lives had some of these officials in the endeavour to do these and other most onerous and difficult duties,<sup>1</sup> as we learn from

<sup>1</sup> At this time, and for many years subsequently, the mails were carried on horseback by postboys. Some of these postboys were sad rogues, who took advantage of the confusion in the two posts in order to do business on their own account, carrying letters concealed upon them, of course for charges quite unorthodox. As an illustration, take a complaint from one of the surveyors in question, which, though exhibiting no little malice, and little good grammar, tells a plain tale, and will suffice to show the curious way things were managed in 1735 : “ At this place (Salisbury) found the post boys to have carried on vile practices in taking the bye letters, delivering them in this city, and taking back answer, especially the Andover riders. On the 15th inst. found on Richard Kent, one of the Andover riders, 5 bye letters, all for this city. Upon examining the fellow, he confessed he had made it a practice, and persisted to continue in it, saying he had no wages from his master. I took the fellow before the magistrates, proved the facts, and he was committed, but pleading to have no money or friends, desired a punishment to be whipped, and accordingly he was to the purpose. Wrote the case to Andover, and ordered the fellow to be dismissed, but no regard was had thereto, but the

the *Surveyors' Books*, referring to country post-offices from 1735 onwards! Notwithstanding the losses which Mr. Allen must have suffered through the delinquency or carelessness of country postmasters, yet in an account which he left at his death he estimated the net profits of his contracts at the sum of 10,000*l.* a year, a sum which, during his official life, amounted to a total of nearly half a million sterling!

Mr. Allen not only reaped golden harvests, but deserved to do so. His energy and careful organizing powers are worthy of all praise, and, inasmuch as he laid the foundation for the future improvements at the Post-office, and carried out schemes over which officialdom had failed, he deserves the gratitude of posterity. Not alone in his public, but in his private capacity, Mr. Allen commanded universal respect. In the only short account of this estimable man which we have been able to find<sup>1</sup>—and here we must confess our astonishment that all the so-called Comprehensive Biographical Dictionaries of his or our day make no kind of mention of him—a contemporary writer states that “he was not more remarkable for the ingenuity and industry, with which he made a very large fortune, than for the charity, generosity, and kindness with which he spent it.” It is certain that Allen bestowed a considerable part of his income in works of charity, especially in supporting needy men of letters. He was a great friend and benefactor of Henry Fielding, and in *Tom Jones*, the novelist has gratefully drawn Allen’s character in the person of *Squire Allworthy*. He enjoyed the friendship of Chatham, and Pope and other men of literary distinction knew him intimately. Pope introduced Allen to Bishop Warburton as “one of the wealthiest and kindest of mortals,” and the ambitious author of the *Divine Legation* so far improved upon this introduction as to seek and obtain the hand of Allen’s niece, and with her a considerable fortune, and

next day the same rider came post, ran about the city for letters, and *was insolent*. Again he came post with two gentlemen, made it his business to take up letters; the fellow, however, instead of returning to Andover, got two idle fellows and rides off with the three horses, which was a return for his master not obeying my instructions.” Our shrewd surveyor thus amply got his revenge, and the Post-office and Mr. Allen suffer no more from the dishonesties and impertinencies of Richard Kent.—From Mr. Scudamore’s *Notes*, Post-master-General’s *First Report*.

<sup>1</sup> *Gentleman’s Magazine*, August, 1764.

almost constant residence at Prior Park. A codicil to Allen's will, dated the November before he died, contains the following interesting bequest :—"For the last instance of my friendly and grateful regard for the best of friends, as well as for the most upright and ablest of ministers that has adorned our country, I leave to the Right. Hon. William Pitt (Chatham) the sum of 1,000*l.* to be disposed of by him to any of his children as he may be pleased to appoint."

Pope has celebrated one of his principal virtues, unassuming benevolence, in the well-known lines :—

"Let humble *Allen*, with an awkward shame,  
Do good by stealth, and blush to find it fame."

Fielding's picture of Allen, in the character of *Allworthy*, is of course coloured with the warmth of private friendship, but its truthfulness left little room to doubt as to the person for whom it was intended. *Allworthy* is presented on a fine May morning walking upon the terrace before his mansion, planning some generous action, when, "in the full blaze of his majesty up rose the sun, than which one object alone in this lower creation could be more glorious, and that Mr. *Allworthy* himself presented—a human being *replete with benevolence*, meditating in what manner he might render himself most acceptable to his Creator, by doing most good to His creatures."

Mr. Allen divided his time between his literary friends in London and his native city of Bath, near which city stood his elegant villa in Prior Park. At both places he was able to give direct superintendence to his postal plans. It may not be thought foreign to our subject to add that a quarrel took place between Pope and Mr. Allen in 1745, when the latter was Mayor of Bath. Both Mr. Cunninghame and Sir John Hawkins give a similar account of the rupture. Pope with Martha Blount signified his intention to go to the Popish chapel, and desired of Mr. Allen the use of his chariot for the purpose ; but he, being chief magistrate, suggested the impropriety of having his carriage seen at the door of a place of worship to which, as Mayor, he was "at least refrained from giving any sanction, and which he might be required to suppress," and therefore desired to be excused. The two friends often met afterwards, but never



on the same terms ; "they stood aloof, the scars remaining." Dr. Johnson says that even Pope's will bore marks of the wounded pride and sense of injury from the disturbance in question.

On the death of Allen, the Postmasters-General appointed an officer named Mr. Ward to take the charge of the "Bye Letter-office," as the branch was now called, at the salary of 300*l.* a year. The success of the amalgamation scheme was so complete, that at the end of the first year profits to the amount of 20,000*l.* were handed over to the Crown. Afterwards, the proceeds continued to increase even still more rapidly ; so much so, that when, in 1799, the Bye Letter-office was abolished, and its management transferred to the general office, they had reached the enormous yearly sum of 200,000*l.*

The statute of Queen Anne provided that a weekly payment of 700*l.* should be made to the Exchequer from the Post-office for a period of thirty-two years. Though on the accession of George I. an Act was passed (3 George I. chap. 7) to make this payment perpetual, it was thought proper that another Act should be passed in 1743, on the expiration of the term of thirty-two years, to the same effect. In order also to keep up the revenue derived from the Post-office, which was yearly increasing, and far too important to relinquish, the rates of postage, instead of being lowered as stipulated in 1710, were kept up at their old figure till 1761, when they were altered, though increased. 1 George III. chap. 25, provides, that the improvement of correspondence is a matter of such great concernment, and so highly necessary for the extension of trade and commerce, that the statutes of Queen Anne need repealing to some extent, and especially as, through vast accession of territory, no posts or post rates are arranged to all His Majesty's dominions ; and also, because in England such great and varied changes have occurred since her reign. The improvements and alterations made at this time may thus be summed up, viz.—

1. Additions are made to the vessels on the American station ; several additional packets are put on between England and Spain and Portugal. Other and cheaper rates of postage are established between London and New York, and all His Majesty's territories in America.

2. Concerning letters brought by private ship from any foreign part, no ship or vessel shall be permitted to make entry in any port of Great Britain, or to unload any of its cargo, until all letters and packets brought by such ship, or any passenger on board such ship, are delivered into the hands of the deputy-postmaster of the port, and until the captain shall receive the deputy's receipt for the same. In cases where the vessel "is liable to the performance of quarantine," the first step must be to deliver the letters into the hands of the superintendent of the quarantine, to be by him despatched to the Post-office. A penalty of 20*l.* with full costs to be inflicted on any master not delivering a letter or packet of letters according to this Act, one moiety to go to the King and the other to the person informing.

3. The roads are to be re-surveyed, under the arrangements laid down in Queen Anne's Act, for the purpose of settling the rates of postage afresh.

4. Letters to be charged according to the post-stages travelled, or shorter distances to be paid for ; thus :—

			<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>
For the conveyance of every single letter not exceeding 15 miles			0	1
"	"	double letter . . . . .	0	2
"	"	ounce . . . . .	0	4
"	"	single letter, 30 miles and under 40	0	2
"	"	double letter . . . . .	0	4
"	"	ounce . . . . .	0	8
"	"	single letter, 40 miles and under 80	0	3
"	"	double letter . . . . .	0	6
"	"	ounce . . . . .	1	0

And so on.

These rates were again altered in the twenty-fourth year of the reign of George III. for the raising of revenue to defray His Majesty's expenses, the alteration, which took effect on the introduction of mail-coaches, consisting of the addition of one penny to every existing charge.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> As an example of the summary proceedings of those days, we may here just note the remarks which Mr. Pitt made in his place in Parliament when he proposed this increase, calculating that the change would produce at least 120,000*l.* additional revenue out of the Post-office. The tax upon letters, said he, could be calculated with a great degree of certainty, and the changes he had to propose would *by no means reduce the number sent*. It was idle to

5. Permission is given to settle penny Post-offices in other towns in England, on the same basis as the London penny-post establishment. The permission thus granted was soon applied, and long before the establishment of uniform penny-postage, there were at least a thousand penny-posts in existence in different towns. The principle which guided the Department in establishing penny-posts was to select small towns and populous neighbourhoods not situated in the direct line of general post conveyances, which were desirous of obtaining extra facilities, and granting such posts provided that they did not afford the means for evading the general post. The only requisite was, that the authorities should have a reasonable hope that the proposed post would yield sufficient to pay for its maintenance—a thing considered settled if the receipts on its first establishment would pay two-thirds of the entire charges.

6. The weight of any packet or letter to be sent by the London penny-post, or any of the new penny-posts to be established under this improved Act, must not now exceed four ounces.

In 1749, the Act restraining any other but officers of the Post-office from letting out horses to hire for the purpose of riding post, is stated not to refer to cases where chaises, "calashes," or any other vehicles, are furnished. Vehicles to drive may be provided on either post-roads or elsewhere by any person choosing to engage in the trade. In 1779, the Acts giving exclusive privilege to the Postmasters-General and their deputies as to the letting of post-horses for hire, are henceforth repealed.

While speaking of the Post-office revenue, we may here simply state the clause in Queen Anne's Act, which relates to the *surplus* revenue. By surplus revenue we mean the sum remaining after the expenses of management, the pensions, and the weekly 700*l.* sent to the Exchequer had been paid. It would seem to have been retained by the queen entirely "for the better

suppose that the public would grumble in having to pay just one penny additional for valuable letters safely and expeditiously conveyed. He proposed "to charge all letters that went one stage, and which now paid one penny, in future the sum of 2*d.*, and this would bring in the sum of 8,230*l.* All that now pay 2*d.* paying an additional penny would yield 8,923*l.* Threepenny letters paying another penny would produce 33,963*l.* The increase of four-penny letters would produce 34,248*l.*" The cross-roads he could not speak of with great certainty, but he thought they might calculate on at least 20,000*l.* from that source, and so on, till the estimated sum was reached.

support of Her Majesty's Household, and for the honour and dignity of the Crown of Great Britain." On the accession of George I. a Bill granting the same rights and privileges during the king's lifetime was passed in much the same words in the first session of his Parliament. In the first year of the reign of George II. and his grandson George III. the same rights and privileges were obtained under the same conditions. In addition to the proper charges appertaining to the Post-office, we find it was customary during the reign of the first Georges, as well as earlier sovereigns, to make certain payments out of the receipts before the balance was applied in the manner above spoken of. It would seem, in fact, that grants were made out of the Post-office funds, and placed to "incidents," when it was thought necessary to keep the items out of the public sight, or when it was thought undesirable to establish precedents. Thus, in 1723, an allowance of 200*l.* a year is made to a Mr. French, to aid him in keeping up a lighthouse "on the rock called Sherries, near Holyhead." Mr. Goodman, Secretary of the Post-office, is allowed large sums to pay for "secret service." Lord Chancellor King is, from July 1725, granted an annuity of 6,000*l.* "for his better and more honourable support." George Tilson is appointed (1726) to the office of "Register and Keeper of the Papers and Records of State," his salary of 400*l.* per annum to be charged to Post-office incidents.<sup>1</sup> From 1739 to 1746 inclusive, the then Lord Chancellor has 5,000*l.* a year, Mr. Goodman 4,700*l.* a year for "secret service money," while other persons have different amounts placed against their names for services which are not recorded.<sup>2</sup> Though the conditions of the following Act were, in reality, carried out several years previously, when a salary of 700,000*l.* a year was granted to the king for the support of his household, Section 48 of 27 George III. enacts, that, for the king's lifetime, "the entire net revenue of the Post-office shall be carried to and made part of the fund, to be called the 'Consolidated Fund.'" It is scarcely needful to say this arrangement exists at present.

The Scotch Post-office progressed during the eighteenth century considerably. In the early part of that century the

<sup>1</sup> *Treasury Letter Book*, 1715—1724.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 1742—1759.



General Post-office was under the control of George Main, a jeweller in Edinburgh, who had a salary of 200*l.* per annum. Under him we find an accountant with 50*l.* yearly, a clerk with 50*l.* a clerk's assistant with 25*l.* and three letter-carriers or "runners" with 5*s.* each per week. In 1710, as we have seen, the rates of postage were altered on the settlement of the Post-office, and henceforth the Scotch office became remunerative, though it is difficult, from the different sums given by different authorities, to estimate the progress made. It is probable, however, that from 4,000*l.* in this year, the net revenue gradually increased during the century, till it reached 12,000*l.* in 1760, and 16,000*l.* in 1798. In the year 1715 there was a change of management, owing, no doubt, to the following document reaching the English Lords of the Treasury, which, in its way, is curious. It is signed by "Argyll," "Roxburghe," "Montrose," and "Ilay." "We are of opinion that it is for His Majesty's service that Mr. Main should be removed from his office of Deputy Postmaster of Scotland, and that Mr. James Anderson be appointed to supply that place." The one was dismissed and the other appointed in this summary manner accordingly. Anderson was a writer to the signet, a man of considerable parts, and well esteemed in the Scotch metropolis. In a large collection of his manuscript papers preserved in the Advocate's library in Edinburgh, and which, through the kindness of Mr. Halkett, the principal librarian, we have carefully examined, there is a great number of his official letters, which give much interesting information of the details of the Scotch post-office from 1715 to 1718. Anderson was evidently a painstaking manager, and it was very much owing to his shrewdness and ability that the first horse-posts were established in Scotland, viz. that between Edinburgh and Stirling. Two years afterwards, the provost and magistrates of Glasgow petitioned the English Postmasters-General for the establishment of such a post between Edinburgh and Glasgow. The English authorities applied to Anderson, who described the benefit it would be to both towns, and assured them it would soon pay its expenses.<sup>1</sup> After some delay the Treasury Lords assented to the measure. In 1716, "the Duke of Argyll, who had supreme control in Scotland, gave orders to

<sup>1</sup> *Treasury Letter Book*, 1714—1720.

Mr. Anderson to place relays of horses from Edinburgh to Inverness, for the purpose of forwarding despatches to, and receiving intelligence from, the army in the Highlands under General Cadogan. These posts worked upon two lines of road—the one through Fife and round by the east coast, passing through Aberdeen; the other took the central road *viâ* Perth, Dunkeld, and Blair Athole.”<sup>1</sup> These horse-posts were discontinued when the military retired. It was several years before the English method of relays of post-horses and post-boys was resorted to (the fact being that the Scotch office could not bear the expense), and thus, tedious as it was, the old style was continued, when it was well known how superior were the English arrangements. Relays were employed on the revenue continuing to show signs of improvement somewhere about the year 1750.

The tardiness of the mails was only matched by their insecurity. In 1738, the Earl of Ilay (afterwards Duke of Argyll) writing to Sir Robert Walpole, the Secretary of State, says, “I am forced to send this letter by a servant twenty miles out of town, where the Duke of Argyll’s attorney cannot handle it; and I enclose it to William Stewart.” Again, in 1748, the Earl of Ilay, having succeeded his brother, seems to have done just as he did before him. The Commander of the forces in Scotland writes to the Secretary of State, “My letters are opened at the post-office at Edinburgh, and I think this is done by order of the noble duke (Argyle), in order to know the secret sentiments of the people of his Grace: if this practice is not stopped, the ministers cannot hope for any real information.” Mr. Chambers, writing in 1856,<sup>2</sup> and referring to this latter circumstance, says with great truth, “Considering the present sound administration of the entire national institution by the now living inheritor of that peerage, one cannot without a smile hear Chalmers in his *Caledonia* tell how the Edinburgh post-office in the reign of the second George ‘*was infested by two dukes of Argyll.*’ ”

But we must not forget Mr. Anderson and his letters. The letters themselves are very remarkable for clearness, candour, and business-like precision, and, like almost all the official correspondence of that period, are very delightful reading. Anderson

<sup>1</sup> Lang’s *Historical Summary*, pp. 11, 12.

<sup>2</sup> *Domestic Annals of Scotland*, vol. iii.

was familiar with the leading literary characters of Edinburgh of his day, while his position brought him into contact with others, notably with Sir Richard Steele, then one of the commissioners of forfeited estates—of which there would seem to have been no lack at that time. All his subordinates regarded him with great esteem, and the master was evidently proud of it, as the mere existence of the testimonials attests. For an instance among many, the postmaster of Forres, writing to some one in the office in 1717, says, "I am very proud to have the approbation of *such a person* as Mr. Anderson, and shall ever study to advance the public interests with all possible integrity." The trouble about little things, the circumstantiality, and the *naïveté* of the following letter from the chief to the postmaster of Glasgow, his principal subordinate, could not well be surpassed. Acknowledging the receipt of some money, the Postmaster-General thus proceeds:—

"You have *ruled* your account very well, and may continue to do so till your other occasions lead you here, and not come on purpose. (We should think so, Mr. Anderson. Fancy the terrible journey of three days from Glasgow to Edinburgh, to learn how his account book should be ruled!). I'm glad you like the printed directions, and if you have occasion for more let me know. I hope ere long you will be satisfied with something else (promotion seems to be in the wind). I hope the Postmistress of Kilmarnock will do her business well, and follow the good example of her neighbour of Irwin (Irvine). I assure you I am not fond of changes where persons are well affected and acceptable to the neighbourhood. I am glad to hear the poor distressed Postmaster of Paisley is recovering. He has very honestly paid all his bygone monthly bills since my entry."

Even the milk of human kindness in Anderson can be turned sour by repeated bad conduct and failures. He addressed the postmaster of Perth on his slowness in sending cash more than once, and had at last to write more sharply. The postmaster seems from this letter to have paid his later accounts, but to have left a prior one outstanding; "when these proceedings are not cleared it looked not like business," and men less exact than the lawyer Postmaster-General will be apt to agree with him. "I must again request you immediately to clear up all matters till Christmas last. There is scarce an account in the office that lies so much unsettled as yours." He further threatens him with worse punishment; in the meantime he intends to be on

the safe side, and reminds him that the "bonds of cautionrie" given to his predecessor Mr. Main will not do for him, for he must have the said bonds renewed. About the same time he sends to the postmaster of Hamilton, to dismiss one of the runners for repeated bad conduct. "Besides complaints made by Mr. Thompson, others have complained, both by word and writ, so cannot allow any such to continue in your service, and persuade myself that you will choose such a runner as will do his duty honestly and civilly." "As to the runners," writes he to the postmaster of Inverness, "this carrying of baggage is inconvenient and unbecoming the king's runners, and must be put a stop to." To a neighbouring postmaster who wrote a full account of the robbery of the mail bags by the rebel forces he writes encouragingly. "Your account is very much to my satisfaction, and answers the good character I had of you. . . . Be assured that your care and fidelity is very acceptable."

He is "pleased to inform" his brother officer at Dundee that his bag (after 1716) will be sent by the Aberdeen post-runners, and not direct, and the postmaster is delighted; "I am very glad of it, it having been a great trouble to me being obliged to sitt up three nights in the week, the post having come to this place so *untimously*. This will not be after the 24th, for they'll be obliged to keep the tyd."

Mr. Anderson was not above taking advice from residents near some contemplated post-stage, and at this rude period such advice would not be without a certain value. He is directed by the English Postmasters-General to go to Portpatrick and Portnessock to examine which of these places would be most convenient for a packet boat between that part of Scotland and Ireland, and he writes identical letters to the Lairds of Logan and Dunskey telling them that as he is desirous of being fully informed about these matters, "as to what will be best for His Majesty's service and the convenience of his lieges," he would be very glad to meet them on his arrival in their country and take their advice. The former place is chosen, and it remains to this day a small packet station.

The following application from a gentleman—a Mr. Walker, of Galashiels—is sufficiently curious, and illustrates well the straits in which some rural districts were then, and long after—



wards, placed for want of any postal accommodation. The application was backed by several noblemen and gentlemen in the neighbourhood, who would seem to have agreed to pay all necessary expenses. "Being informed by Mr. Walker that he has a desire to procure your order for keeping a letter-box at his house for serving the country about, we are of opinion that this will be a thing very convenient for the neighbourhood, and will be very satisfied that you order it to be done."

Despite Mr. Anderson's abilities and very eminent services, he was somewhat unceremoniously dismissed from his office in 1718 to make way for Sir John Inglis. Like all other officers in any responsible situation, Anderson left in debt, on account of money owing to him from several country places. In 1726 he petitioned the English Treasury Lords to remit him his debt, and to stop an execution which they had made upon his effects, on the ground of his services, "which produced more extraordinary work during the two years he was in office than had been in any twenty years before;" also, because he was very inadequately paid for the work, which had been shown by his successor getting a 100*l.* a year more than he had; and also, because "your petitioner's health is so much impaired (by the troubles of the office during the Rebellion), having contracted a severe rheumatism, which to this day affects him." To make good his case, he appends a memorial, in which is given a list of the services he had rendered to the Post-office. This memorial is very important as presenting a vivid picture of the state of Scotland and the Scotch office, and the modes of operation at that period. Mr. Anderson attributes all his "extraordinary pains" to the Rebellion, for on that account he was "almost hourly receiving and sending expresses from and to London, from and to his Majesty's camp, from and to the commander-in-chief and general officers and lieutenants of counties through the whole country." He then recites how he organized horse-posts to Stirling, to Glasgow, and to Portpatrick from the office of Edinburgh. The following items are curious and interesting: "Sending packet-boats by sea, and expresses by private, trusty hands, when the ordinary post-road was not safe, by the rebels having sent scouts and spies to intercept packets and letters." Then he tells how he did work which nothing but the exigencies

of war or treason would excuse, namely, "by direction to *open all letters* that came from or went to the places which the rebels were in possession of, and to make what discoveries he could of persons and things of concern at that time," and how he did intercept letters "of great consequence, which is known and can be well vouched." Nor was this all in this direction, inasmuch as he "was ordered by the commander-in-chief in Scotland, and by the governors of the Post-office in London, to pick up and get what intelligence he could, wherein he bestowed not only much pains, but also was at expense *not proper to be brought into the office accounts*;" somewhat disreputable work, we are afraid, yet "very acceptable," "as is well known, for which he received many letters of thanks from the governors, who carried several (of his letters) to Court, and some of them were so satisfying as to be printed by authority, and for which he had also thanks from the Secretary's office." This was somewhat special service into which he was impressed, but "with what care and despatch he managed his proper province is sufficiently known, both to His Majesty's civil and military officers employed in Scotland to suppress that *unnatural rebellion*." Then secrecy was "so absolutely necessary that he had to apply himself night and day to the service, so, as he can with great truth and sincerity affirm, that for several months he had never two hours uninterrupted rest or quiet by day or night." Whether the authorities pressed the case or not against him we have no means of knowing, for the official letter book is silent as to the result of his application.<sup>1</sup> No man of the period deserved better of his superiors.

In the year 1766, the first penny post was established in Edinburgh by one Peter Williamson, a native of Aberdeen. He kept a coffee-shop in the hall of the Parliament House, and as he was frequently employed by gentlemen attending the Courts in carrying letters to different parts of the city, it struck him to begin a regular post similar to the London one, with hourly deliveries, and for this purpose he established agents at different parts of the city to collect letters. He employed four letter-carriers, who appeared in uniform, to gather the letters from the agents and then to deliver them as addressed. The

<sup>1</sup> *Treasury Letter Book*, 1715 to 1724, pp. 260—263.

undertaking was very successful, and other speculators were beginning to think of rival establishments, when the Post-office authorities stepped in and succeeded in inducing Williamson to take a pension for the goodwill of the concern, and then merged it in the general establishment.

In 1723 the Edinburgh Post-office occupied the first floor of a house near the Cross, above an alley, which still bears the name of the Post-office Close. It was afterwards removed to a floor on the south side of the Parliament Square, which was fitted up shop fashion, and where the letters were given out from behind an ordinary shop counter, two or three letter-carriers doing all the out-door work.<sup>1</sup> The Post-office was removed to its present situation in 1821. Towards the close of 1865, it is expected the handsome building now rising will be finished and opened for postal purposes.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Chambers', *Traditions of Edinburgh*, p. 124.

<sup>2</sup> It will be remembered that the late lamented Prince Consort laid the foundation-stone of this structure in 1862, this being the last occasion on which he assisted at any public ceremony.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## PALMER AND THE MAIL-COACH ERA.

WE have now arrived at a most important epoch in the history of the English Post-office. Fifteen years after the death of Mr. Allen, John Palmer, one of the greatest of the early post-reformers, rose into notice. To give anything approaching to a proper account of the eminent services that Palmer rendered towards the development of the resources of the Post-office, it is indispensable that we not only give some account of the system of mail conveyance before his time, but also that we notice the progress which had been made in the internal communications of the country.

The past fifty years of which we have spoken in previous chapters, might have been named the "post-boy period," for during all this time the post-boy, whom the poet Cowper has immortalized, rode his slow and weary way,—the system, however, year by year growing more painfully inadequate and inefficient. Cowper, on the score of the importance of his occupation, invests the picture of the post-boy with considerable interest:—

"He comes, the herald of a noisy world,  
With spattered boots, strapped waist, and frozen locks,  
News from all nations lumbering at his back.  
True to his charge, the close-packed load behind,  
Yet careless what he brings,—his one concern  
Is to conduct it to the destined inn,  
And, having dropped th' expectant bag, pass on.  
He whistles as he goes, light hearted wretch,  
Cold and yet cheerful; messenger of grief  
Perhaps to thousands, and of joy to some;  
To him indifferent, whether grief or joy."

It comes, however, within the province of history to relate in sober prose how these post-boys, as a rule, were without discipline, difficult to control, sauntered on the road at pleasure,

and were quite an easy prey to any robber or ill-disposed person who might think it worth their while to interfere with them. It was not an unfrequent complaint within the period, from the surveyors who tried to manage them, that the gentry encouraged many in their irregularities; one of them complains dolorously to head-quarters that gentlemen on the roads "do give much money to the riders, whereby they be very subject to get in liquor, *which stopes the males.*"

In the matter of speed the post-boys seem to have ridden slower towards the end of the century than they did at the commencement of it. Mr. Allen engaged that his boys should all travel at the rate of five miles an hour; after his death, however, they seldom realized four miles in that time. "To show the method, diligence, and exactness of our General Post-office," says a writer of the period, "and the due despatch of the post at each stage, take this specimen." And for our purpose, and as an illustration of our particular subject, we cannot do better than take Stowe's advice, and insert here a copy of a Post-office proclamation and time-bill, given in his *Surveye of London* :—

"Whereas, the management of the postage of letters is committed to our care and conduct: these are therefore in His Majesty's name to require you in your respective stages to use all diligence and expedition in the safe and speedy conveyance of this mail and letters: that you ride five miles an hour according to your articles from London to East Grinstead, and from thence to return accordingly. And hereof you are not to fail, as you will answer the contrary at your perils.

Signed,

Cornwallis.

James Craggs."

TO THE several Postmasters betwixt LONDON AND EAST GRINSTEAD.  
Haste, Haste, Post Haste!

MILES.	From the Letter Office at half-past two in the morning, July 17, 1719.
16	Received at Epsom half an hour past six, and sent away three-quarters past. ALEXANDER FINDLATER.
8	Received at Dorking half an hour past Eight, and sent away at nine. CHAS. CASTLEMAN.
6	Received at <i>Rygate</i> half an hour past ten, and sent away again at eleven. JOHN BULLOCK.
16	Received at East Grinstead at half an hour after three in the afternoon.

The date here given is 1719, but the same arrangements held good in every respect for fully sixty years. The East Grinstead mail would probably be more punctual than the rest, seeing that it was forwarded from and returned to head-quarters. Few post-boys, however, travelled five miles an hour punctually, when Mr. Palmer essayed to improve the service. Expresses during the period might be supposed to have travelled quicker than the ordinary post, yet when in the reign of Queen Anne, Mr. Harley (afterwards Lord Oxford) complained of delay in an express which had been sent to him by Lord Dartmouth, Secretary of State, the Postmasters-General thought there were no grounds for complaint, inasmuch "as it had travelled 136 miles in thirty-six hours, which," added they, "is the usual rate of expresses."

When we add to their slowness and inefficiency the insecurity of the mails, there can be little wonder that plans were forthcoming for a change of system. The post-boys were continually being robbed, and they had not the means, if ever they had the will, to make the least opposition. A robbery of the Portsmouth mail, in 1757, illustrates the carelessness and incompetency of the officers employed. The boy who carried the mail dismounted at Hammersmith, about three miles from Hyde Park Corner, and called for beer, when some thieves took the opportunity to cut the mail-bags from off the horse's crupper, and got away undiscovered. The French mail on its outward-bound passage *viâ* Dover was once stopped, and rifled before it had got clear of London. In another case the post-boy bringing in the Dunkirk mails was set upon at night-time by some foot-pads between Southwark and Deptford, who took from him both horse and mails, the letters being found afterwards opened and scattered about near the spot. It must be added, however, that there was little help for raw, unarmed post-boys, when carriages were stopped in broad daylight in Hyde Park, and even in Piccadilly, and pistols pointed at the breasts of the nobility and gentry living close at hand! Horace Walpole relates a robbery of this kind as happening to himself in Hyde Park in broad daylight, when he was riding with Lord Eglinton and Lady Albemarle.

We should cease to wonder at these irregularities could the difficulties attending travelling be properly pictured. In 1703,

when Prince George of Denmark went from Windsor to Petworth to meet Charles III. of Spain, he was fourteen hours in going forty miles, the last nine miles of road—for the more remote from the metropolis the worse the roads invariably became—requiring no less than six. The early writer who records this fact says that the long time was the more surprising, as *except when overturned*, or when stuck fast in the mud, his royal highness and retinue made no stop during the journey.<sup>1</sup> Twenty years after this period the road between London and Brentford was considered a fair average road, yet, when in 1727 George II. and Queen Caroline took to it, they were a whole night travelling from the palace at Kew to that of St. James's. Between Hammersmith and Fulham they were overturned, and both the elector and electress were pitched into a quagmire. To illustrate this part of our subject, we cannot do better than turn to the pages of Arthur Young,<sup>2</sup> a famous traveller of last century, who journeyed between London and the North of England by two different routes, to report upon the progress of agricultural pursuits. No reader of Young but will be amused as well as enlightened by his account of the roads of that period, and the vigorous language he makes use of in describing them. It would be impossible to avoid the reflection that under these difficulties, post-office work, so dependent on the facilities for locomotion, would go on far from smoothly in the localities described. About half the roads upon which he travels are designated as "good," and "very good." Of the remainder we will make a list, and add his lucid and forcible descriptions. He takes the great north road, and makes several *detours* to visit the different agricultural districts :—

To *Luton* ; the cross-road execrable.

To *Dunstable* ; a cross-road, very indifferent.

To *Bedford* ; turnpike : a vile, narrow, cut-up lane.

To *Kimbolton* ; very shabby.

To *Thrapstone* ; a cross-road ; but so so, much cut up.

To *Grimsthorpe* ; cross-road ; very bad ; at one part of it over a common, with roads pointing *nine* ways at once, and no direction-post.

<sup>1</sup> Our Queen can go from Windsor to Balmoral, or near 600 miles, in about the same time, with every comfort and convenience.

<sup>2</sup> *Tour in the North of England*, vol. iv. pp. 573—582.

To *Colsterworth*; most execrably vile; a narrow causeway, cut into ruts, that threaten to swallow us up.

To *Wakefield*; indifferent; through the town of Wakefield so bad that it ought to be indicted. Most of the Yorkshire roads are favourably spoken of, but there are some exceptions, that

To *Medley*; a cross-road, being a line of vile deep ruts cut into the clay.

To *Temple Newsham*; the road is a disgrace to the whole country.

To *Castle Howard*; infamous. I was near being swallowed up in a slough.

"From Newton to Stokesley in Cleveland," says Young, "is execrably bad. You are obliged to cross the moors they call Black Hambleton, over which the road runs in narrow hollows, that admit a south-country chaise with such difficulty that I reckon this part of the journey made at the hazard of my neck. The going down into Cleveland is, beyond all description, terrible; for you go through such steep, rough, narrow, rocky precipices, that I would sincerely advise any friend to go a hundred miles to escape it. The name of this pass is very judicious, *Scarthneck*, that is, *Scare-nick*, or frighten the devil." Here and there we come across testimonials to country gentlemen to whose public spirit many miles of the good roads Young travelled were owing. Thus: "Round Swinton, the seat of W. Danby, Esq. the roads are all excellent, that gentleman making and mending with incomparable spirit. Through his own parishes he makes them himself, and bribes others; he has either made or contributed to twenty miles of good road." He continues:—

From *Richmond* to *Darlington*; part of the great north road; execrably broke into holes like an old pavement; sufficient to dislocate one's bones.

To *Morpeth*; a pavement a mile or two out of Newcastle: all the rest vile.

To *Carlisle*; cut up by innumerable little paltry one-horse carts.

When Young reaches Lancashire through Westmorland, his indignation knows no bounds. From Preston to Wigan the road is "infernal." "I would most seriously caution all travellers



who may purpose to travel this terrible country to avoid it as they would the devil, for a thousand to one they will break their necks or their limbs by overthrows or breakings-down." From Wigan to Warrington the road is even worse; "any person would imagine the boobies of the country had made it with a view to immediate destruction." Here we close this terrible picture, to notice how soon these things were changed, and the difficulties to a free postal communication gradually removed.

The growth of trade and the spread of commerce among the richer classes of the community were the means of opening out the country in all directions. Peers and rich commoners shared the amusements of trade and speculation with the duties of civil government; such men as the Duke of Bridgewater did incalculable service towards the development of the resources of the country. Civil engineering under such patronage acquired the dignity of a profession. This was the age of Brindley and Smeaton, Rennie and Telford, Watt and Boulton. Blind old Metcalfe, whose name should be placed even before that of Macadam, took to road-making in the north; and had Young made a second *Tour* he would have found Yorkshire, at any rate, more to his liking. In every district of the kingdom, even the most remote, roads, the veins of a nation, were constructed on the best principle then known; bridges were built in all parts of the country; the Bridgewater and other canals were opened for traffic, whilst many more of all these good works were projected. Moreover—and this is perhaps more germane to our special subject—many decided improvements were apparent in the means of conveyance at the same time.<sup>1</sup> While, on the one

<sup>1</sup> No one who has read *Roderick Random* can forget the novelist's description of his hero's ride from Scotland to London. As it is generally considered to be a veritable account of a journey which Smollett himself made early in the century, the reader may be of opinion that there was abundance of room for the improvement here spoken of. Roderick, however, travelled in the "stage waggon" of that time. He and his faithful friend Strap having observed one of these waggons a quarter of a mile in advance of them, hurried on, and speedily overtook it, when ascending by means of the usual ladder at the end of the waggon, they "tumbled into the straw under the darkness of the tilt," amidst four passengers, two gentlemen and two ladies." When they arrived at the first inn, Captain Weazel desired a room for himself and lady, "with a separate supper;" but the impartial innkeeper was adverse to this, saying, he "had prepared victuals for the passengers in the waggon, without respect of

hand the ordinary stage-coach had found its way on to every considerable road, and was still equal to the usual requirements, the speed at which it travelled did not at all satisfy the enterprising merchants of Lancashire and Yorkshire. So early as 1754, a company of merchants in Manchester started a new vehicle called the "Flying Coach," which seems to have owed this designation to the fact that its proprietors contemplated running it at the accelerated speed of about five miles an hour. It started with the following remarkable prospectus:—"However incredible it may appear, this coach will actually (barring accidents) arrive in London in four days and a half after leaving Manchester." The Scotch people were behind the English in stage-coach accommodation. In May, 1734, however, a comparatively spirited effort was made in this respect, when John Dale announced in Edinburgh (with an indefiniteness pleasanter to read about than to experience, one would think) that a coach would set out from that place "for London *towards the end of each week*, to be performed in nine days, or three days sooner than any coach that travels that road." In 1754, the year of the Manchester "Flying Coach," a new coach was brought out in Edinburgh, though the speed at which it travelled was not meant to eclipse John Dale's. It was of better appearance, however, and the announcement heralding its introduction to the Edinburgh public sought for it general support on the ground of the extra comfort it would offer to travellers. "The Edinburgh stage-coach," says the prospectus, "for the better accommodation of passengers, will be altered to a new genteel two-end glass machine, hung on steel springs, exceedingly light and easy, to go (to London) in ten days in summer, and twelve in winter."<sup>1</sup> Three years after this, the Liverpool merchants established another "flying machine on steel springs," which was designed to, and did, beat the Manchester one in the matter of speed; three days only being allowed for the journey from Liverpool to persons." Strap walked by the side of the waggon, changing places with his master, when Roderick desired to walk. The mistakes, the quarrels, and the mirth of the passengers, are told by the novelist with a vivacity and humour which would have been admirable, had it not been so coarse. After five days' rumbling in the straw, the passengers get very friendly; "nothing remarkable happened during the remaining part of our journey, which continued *six or seven days longer*."

<sup>1</sup> Chambers' *Traditions of Edinburgh*, vol. i. p. 168.

London.<sup>1</sup> Sheffield and Leeds followed with their respective "fly-coaches," and by the year 1784—to which year we now more particularly turn our attention—they had not only become quite common, but many of them had acquired the respectable velocity of eight miles an hour.

The post-boy on horseback, travelling at about four miles an hour, had, as we have seen, been an institution since the days of Charles II. and now in the face of the improvements in the means of locomotion, the Post-office was still clinging to the effete old system. It was destined, however, that Mr. Palmer should bring about a grand change. Originally a brewer, Mr. Palmer was, in 1783, the manager of the Bath and Bristol theatres. This position, at that time, gave him considerable weight in the councils of the city of Bath, where he resided; and during the time he leased the theatres he was chosen Mayor of Bath. Before the century closed he had married the daughter of the Duke of Richmond—Lady Madeline Gordon—and sat in the House of Commons as member for Bath. Mr. Palmer seems to have known Mr. Allen, and to have been fully acquainted with his fortunate Post-office speculations. In this way, to some extent, but much more, doubtless, through his public capacity of manager of two large theatres, he became acquainted with the crude and unsatisfactory arrangements of the period, and hence thought of reforms. Having frequently to correspond with the metropolis, and also to journey between London and the then centres of trade and fashion, he noticed how superior the arrangements were for travelling to those under which the the Post-office work was done, and he thus came to the conclusion that the arrangements for the one might be made to fit in to those of the other. Having once got this notion into his head, Mr. Palmer set about investigating the matter. He set on-foot all kinds of inquiries; he made journeys in all directions to inspect personally the system of working. He found that letters, for instance, which left Bath on Monday night were not delivered in London till Wednesday afternoon or night; whereas the stage-coach which left through the day on Monday, arrived in London on the following morning. His journeys in other directions led him to the conclusion that slow and insecure travelling was the

<sup>1</sup> *Baines's History of Lancashire.*

normal condition of the then existing system of mail conveyance. As he afterwards pointed out, he noticed that when tradesmen were particularly anxious to have a valuable letter conveyed with speed and safety, they seldom thought of giving it into the safe keeping of the Post-office, but were in the habit of enclosing it in a brown paper parcel and sending it by the coach; nor were they deterred from this practice by having to pay a rate of carriage for it far higher than that charged for a post-letter. Then robberies of the mails were so frequent, that even to adopt the precaution recommended by the Post-office authorities, and send valuable remittances, such as bank-notes, bills of exchange, &c. *at twice*, was a source of endless trouble and annoyance, which even might not be effective after all.

Mr. Palmer, however, was ready ere long with a remedy against tardiness, robbery, and all the other countless defects in the existing arrangements. He at first confided his scheme to Lord Camden, and that nobleman agreed to recommend him and his schemes to the consideration of Mr. Pitt, who had that year taken the reins of government, and who, besides, had taken charge of the revenue as Chancellor of the Exchequer. Mr. Palmer was directed to send in a report describing his plan as fully as possible. He commenced by describing the post-boy system. "The post," he said, "at present, instead of being the quickest, is almost the slowest conveyance in the country; and although, from the great improvements in our roads, other carriers have proportionately mended their speed, the post is as slow as ever." The system was also unsafe; robberies were frequent, and he saw not how it could be otherwise if there were no changes. "The mails," continued Palmer, "are generally intrusted to some idle boy without character, mounted on a worn-out hack, and who, so far from being able to defend himself, or escape from a robber, is more likely to be in league with him." If robberies were not so frequent as the circumstances might lead people to suppose, it was simply because thieves had found, after long practice, that the mails were scarcely worth robbing—the booty to be obtained being comparatively worthless, inasmuch as the public found other means of sending letters of value. Mr. Palmer, as we have before stated, knew of tradesmen who sent letters by stage-coach.

Why, therefore, "should not the stage-coach, well protected by armed guards, under certain conditions to be specified, carry the mail-bags?" Though by no means the only recommendation which Mr. Palmer made to the Prime Minister, this substitution of a string of mail-coaches for the "worn-out hacks" was the leading feature of his plans. Evincing a thorough knowledge of his subject (however he may have attained that knowledge), and devised with great skill, the measures he proposed promised to advance the postal communication to as high a pitch of excellence as was possible. To lend to the scheme the prospect of *financial* success, he laboured to show that his proposals, if adopted, would secure a larger revenue to the Post-office than it had ever yet yielded; whilst as far as the public were concerned, it was evident that they would gladly pay higher for a service which was performed so much more efficiently. Mr. Pitt, who always lent a ready ear to proposals which would have the effect of increasing the revenue, saw and acknowledged the merits of the scheme very early. But, first of all, the Post-office officials must be consulted; and from accounts<sup>1</sup> which survive we learn how bitterly they resented proposals not coming from themselves. They made many and vehement objections to the sweeping changes which Palmer's plans would necessitate. "The oldest and ablest officers in the service" represented them "not only to be impracticable, but dangerous to commerce and the revenue."<sup>2</sup> The account of the way in which they met some of his proposals is most amusing and instructive. Thus, Palmer recommended Mr. Pitt to take some commercial men into his councils, and they would not fail to convince him of the great need there was for change. He also submitted that the suggestions of commercial men should be listened to more frequently, when postal arrangements for their respective districts should be made. Mr. Hodgson, one of the surveyors of the Post-office, indignantly answered that "it was not possible that any set of gentlemen, merchants, or outriders (commercial travellers, we suppose), could instruct

<sup>1</sup> *Vide* Report of the Committee of House of Commons in 1797, on "Mr. Palmer's Agreement for the Reform and Improvement of the Post-office and its Revenue," p. 115.

<sup>2</sup> Report of the Committee appointed to inquire into the state of the Public Offices in 1788.

officers brought up in the business of the Post-office. And it is particularly to be hoped," said this gentleman, with a spice of malice, "if not presumed, that the surveyors need no such information." He "ventured to say, that the post as then managed was admirably connected in all its parts, well-regulated, carefully attended to, and not to be improved by any person unacquainted with the whole. It is a pity," he sarcastically added, "that Mr. Palmer should not first have been informed of the nature of the business in question, to make him understand how very-differently the post and post-offices are conducted to what he apprehends."

Mr. Palmer might not be, and really was not, acquainted with all the working arrangements of the office he was seeking to improve: yet it was quite patent to all outside the Post-office that the entire system needed re-modelling. Mr. Hodgson, however, and his *confrères* "were amazed," they said, "that any dissatisfaction, any desire for change, should exist." The Post-office was already perfect in their eyes. It was, at least, "almost as perfect as it can be, without exhausting the revenue arising therefrom." They could not help, therefore, making a united stand against any such new-fangled scheme, which they predict "will fling the commercial correspondence of the country into the utmost confusion, and which will justly raise such a clamour as the Postmaster-General will not be able to appease." Another of the principal officers, a Mr. Allen, who seems to have been more temperate in his abuse of the new proposals, gave it as his opinion, "that the more Mr. Palmer's plan was considered, the greater number of difficulties and objections started to its ever being carried completely into execution."

From arguing on the general principles involved, they then descend to combat the working arrangements of the theatre-manager with even less success. Mr. Palmer complains that the post is slow, and states that it ought to outstrip all other conveyances. Mr. Hodgson "could not see *why* the post should be the swiftest conveyance in England. Personal conveyances, I apprehend, should be much more, and particularly with people travelling on business." Then followed Mr. Draper, another official, who objected to the coaches as travelling too fast. "The post," he said, "cannot travel with the expedition

of stage-coaches, on account of the business necessary to be done in each town through which it passes, and without which correspondence would be thrown into the utmost confusion." Mr. Palmer had proposed that the coaches should remain fifteen minutes in each town through which they passed, to give time to transact the necessary business of sorting the letters. Mr. Draper said that half an hour was not enough, as was well enough known to persons at all conversant with Post-office business. Living in this age of railways and steam, we have just reason to smile at such objections. Then, as to the appointment of mail-guards, Mr. Palmer might, but Mr. Hodgson could not, see security, though he could see endless trouble, expense, and annoyance in such a provision. "The man would doubtless have to be waited for at every alehouse the coach passed." He might have added that such had been the experience with the post-boys under the *régime* which he was endeavouring to perpetuate. Mr. Palmer stipulated, that the mail-guards should in all cases be well armed and accounted, and such officers "as could be depended upon as trustworthy." But the Post-office gentlemen objected even to this arrangement. "There were no means of preventing robbery with effect,<sup>1</sup> as the strongest cart or coach that could be made, lined and bound with iron, might easily be broken into by determined robbers," and the employment of armed mail-guards would only make matters worse. Instead of affording protection to the mails, the following precious doctrine was inculcated, that the crime of murder would be added to that of robbery; "for," said the wonderful Mr. Hodgson, "when once desperate fellows had determined upon robbery, resistance would lead to murder"! These were peace and non-resistance principles with a vengeance, but principles which in England, during the earlier years of Pitt's administration, would seldom be heard, except in furtherance of some such selfish views as those which the Post-office authorities held in opposition to Mr. Palmer's so-called innovations.

Mr. Palmer's propositions also included the timing of the

<sup>1</sup> Post-office robberies had been exceedingly numerous within a few years of the change which Palmer succeeded in inaugurating. Though one prosecution for a single robbery cost the authorities no less a sum than 4,000*l.* yet they regarded the occurrences as unavoidable and simply matters of course.

mails at each successive stage, and their departure from the country properly regulated, they would thus be enabled to arrive in London at regular specified times, and not at any hour of the day or night, and might, to some extent, be delivered simultaneously. Again : instead of *leaving* London at all hours of the night, he suggested that all the coaches for the different roads should leave the General Post-office at the same time ; and thus it was that Palmer established what was, to the stranger in London for many years, one of the first of City sights. Finally, Mr. Palmer's plans were pronounced impossible. "It was an impossibility," his opponents declared, "that the Bath mail could be brought to London in sixteen or eighteen hours."

Mr. Pitt was less conservative than the Post-office authorities. He clearly inherited, as an eloquent writer<sup>1</sup> has pointed out, his father's contempt for impossibilities. He saw, with the clear vision for which he was so remarkable, that Mr. Palmer's scheme would be as profitable as it was practicable, and he resolved, in spite of the short-sighted opposition of the authorities, that it should be adopted. The Lords of the Treasury lost no more time in decreeing that the plan should be tried, and a trial and complete success was the result. On the 24th of July, 1784, the Post-office Secretary (Mr. Anthony Todd) issued the following order :—"His Majesty's Postmasters-General, being inclined to make an experiment for the more expeditious conveyance of mails of letters by stage-coaches, machines, &c. have been pleased to order that a trial shall be made upon the road between London and Bristol, to commence at each place on Monday, the 2d of August next." Then follows a list of places, letters for which can be sent by these mail-coaches, and thus concludes : "All persons are therefore to take notice, that the letters put into any receiving-house before six of the evening, or seven at this chief office, will be forwarded by these new conveyances ; all others for the said post-towns and their districts put in afterwards, or given to the bellmen, must remain until the following post at the same hour of seven.

<sup>1</sup> Mr. M. D. Hill, in *Fraser's Magazine* : "Tell him," said Lord Chatham to a subordinate, "it is an order from one who *treads on impossibilities*."



The mail-coaches commenced running according to the above advertisement, not, however, on the 2d, but on the 8th of August. One coach left London at eight in the morning, reaching Bristol about eleven the same night. *The distance between London and Bath was accomplished in fourteen hours.* The other coach was started from Bristol at four in the afternoon on the same day, reaching London in sixteen hours.

Mr. Palmer was installed at the Post-office on the day of the change, under the title of Controller-General. It was arranged that his salary should be 1,500*l.* a year, together with a commission of two and a half per cent. upon any excess of net revenue over 240,000*l.*—the sum at which the annual proceeds of the Post-office stood at the date of his appointment.

The rates of postage, as we have before incidentally pointed out, were slightly raised—an addition of a penny to each charge;<sup>1</sup> but notwithstanding this, the number of letters began at once and considerably to increase. So great was the improvement in security and speed, that for once the additions to the charges were borne ungrudgingly. Coaches were applied for without loss of time by the municipalities of many of our largest towns,<sup>2</sup> and when they were granted—as they appear to have been at once in most of the instances—they were started at the rate of six miles an hour. This official rate of speed was subsequently increased to eight, nine, and, at length, to ten miles an hour.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ante*, pp. 123, 4. Note.

<sup>2</sup> The Liverpool merchants were the first to petition the Treasury for the new mail coach. "This petition being complied with," says Mr. Baines in his *History of Liverpool*, "the letters from London reached Liverpool in thirty hours. The coaches carried four passengers, besides the coachman and guard, both dressed in livery, the latter being armed to the teeth, as a security against highwaymen." In October, 1784, York applied for a mail coach to pass through that place on its way to the north. When it was granted, it went through to Edinburgh. The first "patent" mail coach from Edinburgh to Aberdeen was started in 1798.

<sup>3</sup> This velocity was not attained without much misgiving and distrust on the part of travellers. When the eight miles was increased to ten miles per hour, the public mind was found to be in the different stages of alarm and revolt. Vested interests, as is usual in such cases, indulged in the gloomiest forebodings of what would happen to those who should knowingly spurn the ways of Providence. Lord Chancellor Campbell used to relate how he was frequently warned against Palmer's mail coaches on account of the fearful rate at which they flew, and instances were supplied to him of passengers who had died suddenly of apoplexy from the rapidity of the motion.

Soon after their introduction, and to mark the public appreciation of the benefits derived from the new coaches, and the great importance attached to the change, a copper medal—"mail-coach halfpenny"—was struck. Underneath the representation of the coach and its team of horses at full speed, are the words, "To trade expedition and to property protection," while on the reverse side a dedication as follows:—"To J. Palmer, Esq. This is inscribed as a token of gratitude for benefits received from the establishment of mail-coaches."<sup>1</sup>

The opposition to Mr. Palmer's scheme<sup>2</sup> exhibited by the Post-office officials before it was adopted, does not seem to have given way before the manifest success attending its introduction. Perhaps Mr. Palmer's presence at the Council Board, and especially considering the anomalous position which he held there, did not conduce to the desirable unanimity of feeling. However it was, he appears to have contended almost single-handed against men resolutely opposed to him, and there is less to wonder at that, so goaded and tormented, he should have fallen into their snares. It would seem that, from the terms of his appointment, Mr. Palmer was independent of all control except from the Treasury, and thus placed side by side with the Postmasters-General, with equal responsibility, it was scarcely in the nature of human events that things should go on smoothly. One of the chiefs, Lord Walsingham, grew more and more hostile, and Palmer, who was somewhat hasty, was often provoked almost beyond endurance, and this led him to commit himself almost beyond hope. The story is short, and may soon be given. Lord Walsingham having made an improvident engagement with a small contractor of the name of Wilson, afterwards refused to complete the same. Palmer, ever on the watch to catch them as the Postmasters-General were to trip him, wrote to his deputy in the office to the following effect:—"The matter should be quietly to throw the blame upon his lordship: let him be bullied,

<sup>1</sup> We are indebted to the Rev. Thomas E. Crallen, of Newick, near Uckfield, for calling our attention to this halfpenny token, and for kindly forwarding one of them for our inspection.

<sup>2</sup> Since we first described this opposition, we have noticed that Sir Rowland Hill makes admirable use of the same facts before one of the select Committees on Postage, in order to show that it was more than probable that the opposition manifested to *his* reform might be called forth by the self-same spirit,

perplexed, and frightened, and made apprehensive that his foolish interference may even occasion a rising of the mail prices, and 20,000*l.* difference to the office. The plan would be to get Wilson aboard, and let him bamboozle his lordship with his slouch, slang, and his blackguard!" On an occasion subsequent to this, he betrayed a wish, also in writing, to the same deputy, "to put back the business of the department in the same irregular and confused state he found it." After writing these and several more indiscreet letters to his deputy, we have the old, old story: a violent dispute occurred between them, when the deputy communicated the whole of the letters to the Post-masters-General, and Palmer was at once suspended. On the letters being submitted to the Treasury Lords, it was deemed desirable that he should surrender his appointment. A pension of 3,000*l.* a year was granted to him in consideration of his valuable services. Subsequently he memorialized the Government, setting forth that his pension fell far short of the emoluments which had been promised him. On the other hand, it was stated that Palmer had never made but a verbal agreement, and that with Mr. Prettyman, Mr. Pitt's private secretary; and that if that gentleman had promised him 2½ per cent. for life on all future increased revenue he had no authority to do so. His petition, therefore, met with no success at the time. Mr. Palmer never ceased to protest against this treatment; and his son, Major-General Palmer, frequently urged his claims before Parliament, until, in 1813, after a struggle of twenty years, the House of Commons voted him a grant of 50,000*l.* In the course of these discussions Palmer was often eulogized, if he was not successful in getting redress. In one of the debates the great minister himself said:—"I always conceived I was best serving the interests of the public, by following the plans laid down by Mr. Palmer." Mr. Sheridan once said:—"No man in this country, or any other, could have performed such an undertaking but that very individual, John Palmer;" and another member followed and said with some truth that "Mr. Palmer's only fault was an overhasty and improvident zeal to do, without regard to his own interests, whatever good it was in his power to achieve for his country."

Now that Mr. Palmer was gone from the Post-office, his

scheme was left to unwilling hands. Though we know not what the country lost in losing the guiding spirit, it is a matter for congratulation that the main elements of his scheme were fully preserved. Though the Post-office officials scrupled not to recommend some return to the old system, Mr. Palmer's plans were—thanks to the vigilant supervision of Mr. Pitt, who had let the reformer go, but had no intention of letting his reforms go with him—fully adhered to until the fact of their success became patent alike to both the public and the official mind. Mr. Palmer himself blamed Mr. Todd, the Secretary of the Post-office, for the greatest part of the thwarting and the opposition which he experienced. How far this is true we have not been able to discover, though we *do* find Mr. Todd, who was secretary and assistant-secretary for about half a century, spoken of as “a man of singular abilities, and generally beloved.”

In the first year of the introduction of the new system, the net revenue of the Post-office was about 250,000*l*. Thirty years afterwards the proceeds had increased sixfold, to no less a sum than a million and a half sterling! Though, as a matter of course, this great increase is partly attributable to the increase of population, and the national advancement generally, it was primarily due to the greater speed, punctuality, and security which the new arrangements gave to the service. Whilst, financially, the issue was most successful, the result, in other respects, was no less certain and gratifying. In 1797, the greater part of the mails were conveyed in one half of the time previously occupied; in some cases in one-third of the time; and, on the cross-roads, in a quarter of the time taken under the old system. Mails not only travelled quicker, but their number was augmented between the largest towns. Other spirited reforms went on most vigorously. Three hundred and eighty towns, which had before but three deliveries a week, now secured one daily. The Edinburgh coach required less time by sixty hours to travel from London; and there was a corresponding reduction between towns at shorter distances. Ten years before the first Liverpool coach was started, a single letter-carrier sufficed for the wants of that place; before the century closed *six* were required. In Edinburgh a proportionate increase took place.<sup>1</sup> The London establishment had, in

<sup>1</sup> Sir Walter Scott relates that a friend of his remembered the London

1800, increased quite twofold in every one of its departments. We find there were at this time 18 principal staff appointments, 62 clerks, 25 messengers, 130 inland letter-carriers, 30 supernumeraries, and 28 foreign letter-carriers. "The immense number of letters despatched nightly from hence," says one writer "excite sensations of astonishment in the mind of the bystander, that can only be exceeded by the rapidity and accuracy with which every part of the duty is managed. All the parts of this wonderful piece of mechanism are upon the same expeditious and accurate plan as at the main source." Seeing the rapid strides which the Post-office had taken during the last century, we can well understand the satisfaction of our author,<sup>1</sup> who thus continues, "It is one of the best organized engines of finance existing under any Government. It has been gradually brought (and to this our readers are witnesses) from the first exertions of individuals, replete with abuses, irregularity, and uncertainty, to its present state of perfection, and is now not only a source of great profit to Government, but commerce derives from its establishment a facility of correspondence which could not be effected by means less powerful or less regular."

The mails under the new system travelled with great security. For many years after their introduction, not a single attempt was made, in England, to rob Palmer's mail-coaches. It is noteworthy, however, though scarcely wonderful, that the changes, when applied to Ireland, did not conduce to the greater security of the mails. The first coach was introduced into Ireland in 1790, and placed on the Cork and Belfast road, a few more following on the other main lines of road. Though occasionally accompanied by as many as *four* armed guards, the mail-coaches were robbed, according to a competent authority, "as frequently as the less-aspiring riding-post."

Not many months after the establishment of mail-coaches, an Act was passed through Parliament, declaring that all carriages and stage-coaches employed to carry His Majesty's mails should henceforth be exempt from the payment of *toll*, on both post and letter-bag arriving in Edinburgh, during the year 1745, with but one letter for the British Linen Company. About the same time the Edinburgh mail is said to have arrived in London, containing but one letter, which was addressed to Sir William Pulteney, the banker.

<sup>1</sup> *Microcosm of London*, vol. ii. p. 228. London, 1800.

cross-roads. Previously, all post-horses employed in the same service travelled free of toll. This Act told immediately in favour of the Post-office to a greater extent than was imagined by its framers. Innkeepers, who in England were the principal owners of stage-coaches,<sup>1</sup> bargained for the carriage of mails, very frequently at merely nominal prices. In return, they enjoyed the advantages of the coach and its passengers travelling all roads free of toll.

Arrived at the end of the century, we find the mail-coach system is now an institution in the country. Other interests had progressed at an equal rate. Travelling, as a rule, had become easy and pleasant. Not that the service was performed without any difficulty or hindrance. On the contrary—and it enters within the scope of our present object to advert to them—the obstacles to anything like a perfect system seemed insurmountable. Though the difficulties consequent on travelling, at the beginning of the present century, were comparatively trifling on

<sup>1</sup> In Ireland, on the contrary, the trade was in the hands of two or three large contractors, who charged heavily for work only imperfectly performed. Until the introduction of railways, the mail service of Ireland, owing to the absurd system adopted, was always worked at a greater cost, comparatively, than in England. In 1829, the Irish service, of considerably less extent, cost four times as much as the entire mail establishment of England. Mr. Charles Bianconi has been the Palmer of Ireland. In the early part of the present century he observed the want of travelling accommodation, and formed plans for serving the country by a regular system of passenger-cars. He succeeded in inducing the different postmasters (who, up to the year 1830, had the conveyance of mails in their own hands, getting certain allowances for the service from Government, and then arranging for carriage in the cheapest way possible) to let him carry their mails. This he did at a cheap rate, stipulating, however, that he should not be required to run his cars at any inconvenient time for passenger traffic. On the amalgamation of the English and Irish Offices in 1830, Mr. Bianconi, who had now established a good reputation, entered into contracts with the general authorities to continue the work, though on a larger scale than ever, the extent of which may be judged by the fact that in 1848 he had 1,400 horses employed. The growth and extent of railway communication necessarily affected his establishment, but, with unabated activity, Mr. Bianconi directed his labours into new districts when his old roads were invaded by the steam-engine and the rail. He is described to have been "ready at a moment's notice to move his horses, cars, and men to any district, however remote, where any chance of business might show itself." A year or two ago this indefatigable man was still busy, and held several postal contracts; his establishment (1860) consisting of 1,000 horses, and between sixty and seventy conveyances, daily travelling 3,000 or 4,000 miles and traversing twenty-two counties.

the *principal post-roads*, yet, when new routes were chosen, or new localities were designed to share in the common benefits of the new and better order of things at the Post-office, these same difficulties had frequently to be again got over. Cross-roads in England were greatly neglected—so much so, in fact, that new mail-coaches which had been applied for and granted, were often enough waiting idle till the roads should be ready to receive them. The Highway Act of 1663, so far as the roads in remote districts were concerned, was completely in abeyance. Early in the century we find the subject frequently mentioned in Parliament. As the result of one discussion, it was decided that every inducement should be held out to the different trusts to make and repair the roads in their respective localities ; while, on the other hand, the Postmaster-General was directed by the Government to indict all townships who neglected the duty imposed upon them. Under the Acts of 7 & 8 George III. c. 43, and 4 George IV. c. 74, commissioners were appointed to arrange for all necessary road improvements, having certain privileges vested in them for the purpose. Thus, they recommended that certain Trusts should have loans granted to them, to be employed in road-making and mending. Mr. Telford, at his death, was largely employed by the Road Commissioners—the improvements on the Shrewsbury and Holyhead road being under his entire superintendence. And it would seem that the above-mentioned road needed improvement. When, in 1808, a new mail-coach was put on to run between the two places, no fewer than twenty-two townships had to be indicted by the Post-office authorities for having their roads in a dangerous and unfinished state.

In Scotland and Ireland great improvements had been made in this respect, considering the previously wretched state of both countries,—Scotland especially. It is an instance of the truth of the saying, that no national calamity is an unmixed evil, that the best turnpike roads in Scotland owe their existence to General Wade and the rebellion. Wade, with most commendable diligence, employed his soldiers, both before and a little subsequent to their disbanding, to construct several “military roads,” which are still the delight of tourists. The famous distich on the obelisk at Fort William may be said to

express no more than the truth in relation to the road between Inverness and Inverary :—

“Had you seen this road before it was made,  
You'd lift up your hands and bless General Wade.”

Still the progress was not so decided as in England. The difficulties encountered in travelling in some parts of Scotland, fully related in the valuable reminiscences of Lord Cockburn and Dr. Alexander Carlyle, serve to show how much remained to be done, even far into the present century. Lord Cockburn, indeed, says that “those who are born to modern travelling can scarcely be made to understand how the previous age got on.” He tells how he rode circuit so late as 1810; how the Bar sometimes rode miles about for want of bridges and good roads; and how there was no mail-coach north of Aberdeen till after the battle of Waterloo.<sup>1</sup> Carlyle, in his *Autobiography*, tells us how a day and a half was still, at the end of the last century, taken up between Edinburgh and Glasgow. In 1788, a direct mail-coach was put on between London and Glasgow, to go by what is now known as the west coast route, *via* Carlisle.<sup>2</sup> The Glasgow merchants had long wished for such a communication, as much time was lost in going by way of Edinburgh. On the day on which the first mail-coach was expected, a vast number of them went along the road for several miles to welcome it, and then headed the procession into the city. To announce its arrival on subsequent occasions, a gun was fired. It was found a difficult

<sup>1</sup> *Memorials of his Time*, vol. i. p. 341.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Cleland, in his *Statistical Account of Glasgow*, tells us that before this time, viz. in 1787, the course of post from London to Glasgow was by way of Edinburgh, *five* days in the week. Only five mails arrived in Glasgow from London on account of no business being transacted at the Edinburgh Office on Sundays. It now occurred, however, to some one of the astute managers of the Post-office, that the *sixth* mail, which the Sunday regulations of the Edinburgh Office prevented being passed through that medium, might be sent by the mail-coach to Carlisle, while a supplementary coach should travel every sixth night between Carlisle and Glasgow. This was done, and the result was the saving of an entire day between London and Glasgow. The other mails continued, as usual, for twelve months longer, it having taken the authorities the whole of that time to discover that the five mails, which required *five* days to reach Glasgow by way of Edinburgh, might, like the sixth, be carried by way of Carlisle, in *four* days. Dr. Cleland, however, does not seem to have perceived that there might be some other reason for adhering to the old route, such as increased outlay, &c.



task, however, to drive the coach, especially in winter, over the bleak and rugged hills of Dumfriesshire and Lanarkshire; the road, moreover, was hurriedly and badly made, and at times quite impassable. Robert Owen, travelling between his model village in Lanarkshire and England, tells us<sup>1</sup> that it often took him two days' and three nights' incessant travelling, to get from Manchester to Glasgow in the coach, the greater part of the time being spent north of Carlisle. On the eastern side of the country, in the direct line between Edinburgh and London, a grand new road had been spoken of for many years. The most difficult part, viz. that between Edinburgh and Berwick, was begun at the beginning of the present century, and in 1824, a good road was finished and opened out as far south as Morpeth, in Northumberland. A continuation of the road from Morpeth to London being greatly needed, the Post-office authorities engaged Mr. Telford, the eminent engineer, to make a survey of it over the remaining distance. The survey lasted many years. A hundred miles of the new Great North Road, south of York, were laid out in a perfectly straight line.<sup>2</sup> All the requisite arrangements were made for beginning the work, when the talk of locomotive engines and tramways, of an untutored genius who was working wonders among the coal-pits of the North, and especially of a race with iron horses at Rainhill, in 1829, had the effect of directing public and official attention to another and more promising method of travelling. All this happened, and very fortunately, just in time to prevent the outlay of an enormous sum for the contemplated high road; while it required but little time to develop the railway system, and demonstrate its usefulness to the postal system of the country.

But we are somewhat anticipating matters, and must, at any rate, allude to the services of Mr. Macadam. The improvements which this gentleman and his three sons brought about in road making had a very sensible effect on the operations of the mail-coach system. The Postmaster-General, the Secretary of the Post-office, and the Superintendent of Mail-coaches all testified in official papers, and in a Committee of the House of Commons (which sat in 1819 to consider a petition of Mr. Macadam for

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Robert Owen. Written by himself.* London, 1857.

<sup>2</sup> *Smiles' Lives of the Engineers*, vol. ii.

remuneration) "to the direct advantage and great benefit" that the Post-office work received from the good roads which were the result of their united labours.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Macadam received but scant justice from the Government, and, besides, his labours were soon rendered fruitless by the iron roads; the wits of London bestowed upon him the title of "Colossus of Rhodes," but he received but little substantial benefit from his invention. Most of the post-roads were *macadamized* before the year 1820, and it was then that the service was in its highest state of efficiency. Accelerations in the speed of the coaches were made as soon as any road was finished on the new principle. From this time the average speed, *including stoppages*, was nine miles an hour, all but a furlong. The fastest coaches (known as the "crack coaches" from this circumstance, as also from travelling on the best roads) were those, in 1836, running between London and Brighton, London and Shrewsbury (accomplishing 154 miles in 15 hours), London and Exeter (171 miles in 17 hours), London and Manchester (187 miles in 19 hours), and London and Holyhead (261 miles in 27 hours). On one occasion, the Devonport mail, travelling with foreign and colonial letters, accomplished the journey of 216 miles, including stoppages, in 21 hours and 14 minutes.

In 1836, there were fifty four-horse mails in England, thirty in Ireland, and ten in Scotland. In England, besides, there were forty-nine mails of two horses each. In the last year of mail-coaches, the number which left London every night punctually at eight o'clock was twenty-seven; travelling in the aggregate about 5,500 miles before they reached their several destinations. We have already stated how the contracts for *horsing* the mail-coaches were conducted; no material change took place in this respect up to the advent of railways. Early in the present century it was deemed desirable that the coaches should both be built and furnished on one plan; hence the "patent coaches," as they were henceforth called. For a number of years, the contract for building and repairing a sufficient number was given to Mr. John Vidler, who had suggested many improvements in their construction. Though the Post-office authorities arranged

<sup>1</sup> See *Remarks on the Present System of Road Making*, by John Loudon Macadam, London, 1824, for fuller particulars.

for building the coaches, the mail-contractors were required to pay for them,—the revenue only bearing the charge of cleaning, oiling, and greasing them, an expense amounting to about 2,200*l.* a year. In 1835, however, on a disagreement with Mr. Vidler, the contract was thrown open to competition, from which competition Mr. Vidler, for a substantial reason, was excluded. He lost very little by this exclusion, as the mail-coach system had now seen its palmiest days, for “they had begun,” in the words of one of the old guards, “to make a gridiron of old England,” five years before. The official control of the coaches, mail-guards, &c. it may be here stated, was vested in the superintendent of mail-coaches, whose location was at the General Post-office.

Any transition from the historical to what we must call the romantic side of our subject, is not so easy for us as we should like it to be ; but we cannot, nevertheless, leave it without attempting to call up a little picture of the past. The last age seems to have been a more social one—at any rate when travelling had to be done ; for then the great work of money-making went hand in hand with, and lent his aid to, the supply of wants of a less exigent character. Little do some of us think of what we have lost in losing the old coach and the old roads (for we have virtually lost them), the pride of the Rennies and the Telfords of a still prior generation. Then, the hundred little incidents by the road ; the wayside changings ; the hospitable inn, and the fireside gossiping at nights, made travelling enjoyable in a way which the present race of travellers can little understand. If ordinary stage-coach travelling was enjoyable, that of the mail-coach must have been much more so. Herring's pencil has pourtrayed in living colours the old Brighton coach, the “Age,” its glittering appearance, its fine stud of blood horses, its real live baronet for driver, and its liveried guard ; and this was no uncommon picture during the first thirty years of the present century,—nay, the artist might have found even a grander and more imposing subject for his pencil among its contemporaries. That some of the men who acted as Jehus and guards should have done so through all kinds of weather, proves that there must have been something strangely attractive in the life they led. The Brighton road was especially fortunate in its choice of

aristocratic drivers. Besides Sir Vincent Cotton, who drove the "Age," the Marquis of Worcester, father of the present Duke of Beaufort, drove the "Beaufort," while the Hon. Fred. Jerningham, a son of Lord Stafford, drove the Brighton day mail. Nor should we fail to relate that, though no fees were solicited on these coaches, all of them pocketed their "tips" with as much readiness and relish as would the poorest of their congeners. A second baronet drove from London into the north for a short time, taking turns for several months with a clergyman—the well-known "Parson Wells," who drove the London and Leeds mail between London and Bedford. Another gentleman, who subsequently rose to eminence in the profession of the law, and who is now on the Bench, preferred to hold the reins of a fine stud attached to a Northern mail-coach, to being held in certain leading-strings, and this he is said to have done for six months, until college doors were once more shut upon him.

Though sometimes so distinguished, the driver's place on the mail was an inferior one in point of position to that of the guard. The guard invariably wore the royal livery, which was a kind of official warrant for the performance of his high duties ; the coachman was sometimes clothed in scarlet, but only as an honorary distinction after long or some special service. The class of guards, though in a remarkable way punctilious in the matter of their dignity, keeping aloof in their solitary seat from too much contact with the passengers, were an intelligent and eminently trustworthy body of men. Commissions of great importance were oftentimes intrusted to them. The country banker, for example, would trust them with untold wealth. Though paid only a nominal sum by the Post-office authorities for their official services (at least, till within the last few years of the system, when railways began to exert a depressing influence on their takings), they were enabled to make their position and place as lucrative as they were responsible, by the help of the regular perquisites and other accidental windfalls which we need not further specify. But it would not be fair to this fine old-world class of men to omit to speak of their duties, how onerous, and difficult, and hazardous they sometimes were ; of the wear-and-tear and fatigue they occasionally underwent ; of the cases of difficulty, such as breakages, overturnings, floods,

and snow-storms, when they went through the worst hardships in a manful and persevering way. Having known several of these men, it has struck us as a curious study, how whilst on duty they would be wrapped in a real or imagined superiority, be brusque and somewhat domineering, whom to jest with would be difficult, whom to "chaff" dangerous, yet in all other respects they should ever be the first to brave any danger, and show concern for the amenities of social life. We have by us, as we write, several records<sup>1</sup> of those fearful snow-storms that occurred in Scotland twenty and thirty years ago, and they bear ample testimony to the extreme patience, self-sacrifice, and diligence of this class of men. One of them tells how a mail-coach having travelled during a driving snow-storm as far as it could advance, the guard, as the custom was in such cases, took the bags with him on horseback for some miles further, and that then the horse, sinking deeper at every step, it was sent back to the coach, while he essaying to carry the bags on foot, was found with them round his neck next morning quite dead. Other cases occur where coachmen and guards, if not passengers, are condemned for days to the coarsest of prison fare among the solitudes of the Scotch hills. Mails arriving in the far north of Scotland with seven days' arrears of bags was no uncommon occurrence, and this was even considered commendable in some seasons, and "would never have been accomplished but through the vigorous never-ceasing exertions" of the men who had them in charge, "who left no scheme untried to get the roads made passable." We would willingly linger over this subject, and endeavour to show how much the Post-office owed to the perseverance, the hardihood, and devotion to duty of the old mail-guards, but we must hasten on.

In these days of cheap postage, and newspapers in every household, it may be difficult to comprehend the intense interest centreing in the appearance of His Majesty's mail-coach on any of the lines of road, and more especially on its arrival at the several provincial towns. On any day the coach was no common object; in times of excitement its appearance was the cause of

<sup>1</sup> Kindly furnished by Mr. John Rodford, at that time the Inspector of Mail Coaches in Scotland. Few snow-storms, however, can have exceeded in severity those of the present winter (1865).

anxiety or joy to thousands. It was the national and authorised organ for publishing the first news of any great national event. "The mail-coach it was," says De Quincey,<sup>1</sup> "that distributed over the face of the land, like the opening of apocalyptic vials, the heart-shaking news of Trafalgar, of Salamanca, of Vittoria, of Waterloo." When the coaches took down into the country the first news of any of the numerous victories achieved by English valour on the Continent, they were dressed in laurels and flowers, oak-leaves and ribbons, and these emblems told the well-known tale throughout the whole course. "The grandest chapter in our experience," says one who often rode the coaches between 1805 and 1815 (a memorable period for the English arms) "was on those occasions when we went down from London with the news of victory." "Five years of life," adds this eloquent and enthusiastic writer, "it was worth paying down for the privilege of an outside place on a mail-coach, when carrying down the first tidings of any such event." During the trial of Queen Caroline, Miss Martineau tells us<sup>2</sup> "all along the line of mails, crowds stood waiting in the burning sunshine for news of the trial, which was shouted out to them as the coach passed." Again, at the different stages in the history of the Reform Bill, the mail-roads were sprinkled over, mile after mile, with people on the *qui vive* for the smallest instalment of news from London, and the coachmen and guards on the top of the coaches shouted out the tidings.

We have said that on any day these coaches attracted no ordinary attention. Beginning with London, throughout the whole route, to the completion of their mission, their course was always a triumphant one; they were cheered on leaving, eagerly looked for, and eagerly welcomed. The spectacle which the coaches presented when, prior to their despatch to the provinces, they were assembled on parade before the General Post-office is said to have been very beautiful, while on unusual occasions, when they were decked out to denote a victory, and crowds cheered at every step, the scene was doubly grand. "The absolute perfection," says De Quincey, "of all the appointments about the carriage and the harness, their strength, their brilliant cleanli-

<sup>1</sup> *Selections, Grave and Gay. English Mail Coach*, p. 290.

<sup>2</sup> *History of England during the Thirty Years' Peace*, vol. i. p. 257.

ness, their beautiful simplicity but, more than all, the royal magnificence of the horses, were what first fixed the attention." Daily each part of every carriage had been very critically examined by a regular inspector; every morning they were thoroughly cleaned; every morning the horses were groomed up to a degree of perfection in such matters not usually attained, and altogether the sight was one which no one seeing could ever forget.

It only remains to notice the annual procession of mail-coaches on the king's birthday, which we are assured was a gay and lively sight. "The cavalcade," says a writer in the earlier part of the century, "was a far more agreeable and interesting sight to the eye and to the *mind* than the gaud and glitter of the Lord Mayor's show," because the former "made you reflect on the advantages derived to trade and commerce and social intercourse by this magnificent establishment" (the Post-office). Hone, in his *Everyday Book*, writing of 1822, tells us that George IV. who was born August 4, changed the celebration of his birthday to St. George's Day, April 23. "According to custom," says he, "the mail-coaches went in procession from Millbank to Lombard Street. About twelve o'clock, the horses belonging to the different mails, with entire new harness, and the post-men and post-boys on horseback arrayed in scarlet coats and jackets, go to Millbank and there dine; from thence the procession, being re-arranged, begins to march about five o'clock in the afternoon, headed by the General Post letter-carriers on horseback. The coaches follow them, filled with the wives and children, friends and relations of the guards and coachmen; while the post-boys, sounding their bugles and cracking their whips, bring up the rear. From the commencement of the procession, the bells of the neighbouring churches ring out merrily, and continue their rejoicing peals till it arrives at the Post-office again, from whence the coaches depart to the different parts of the country." This very plain description of what must have been a most lively and interesting sight would hold good for many years subsequently, in fact, until the coaches were taken off the roads. Great numbers assembled to witness the procession, which was, to the stranger in London especially, an object of great moment. Many country squires, who were always anxious that their best

horses should have a few turns in the mail-coaches in travelling, sent up their horses to figure in the procession, and they would doubtless add much, in the eyes of the experienced in horse-flesh, to the grandeur of the turn-out. The appearance of the coachmen and guards, got up to every advantage, each with an enormous bouquet of flowers in his bran-new scarlet uniform, would be in keeping with the brilliancy of the newly-painted coach, emblazoned with the royal arms.



## CHAPTER IX.

## THE TRANSITION PERIOD AT THE POST-OFFICE.

It must not be supposed that the improvements in mail-conveyance were the only beneficial changes introduced into the Post-office during the fifty years which we have designated as the mail-coach era. It is true that, compared with the progress of the country in many other respects, the period might be termed uneventful. Still, there are incidental changes to chronicle of some importance in themselves, and likewise important in their bearing on the present position of the Post-office. If we retrace our steps to the year 1792, we shall find, for instance, that in that year an entirely new branch of business was commenced at the General Post-office. We refer to the origin of the Money-order establishment. The beginnings of this system, which, as the reader must be aware, has of late years assumed gigantic proportions, were simple and unassuming in the extreme. The Government of the day had expressed a desire for the establishment of a medium by which soldiers and sailors might transmit to their homes such small sums as they could manage to save for that purpose. Three officers of the Post-office jointly submitted a scheme to make a part of the Post-office machinery available in this direction, and a monopoly was readily conceded to them. The undertaking was further favoured with the sanction of the Postmasters-General. The designation of the firm was to be "Stow & Co.," each of the three partners agreeing to find a thousand pounds capital. The stipulations made were, that the business should be carried on at the cost and at the risk of the originators, and that they, in return, should receive the profits. It was agreed, also, that they should enjoy the privilege of sending all their correspondence free of postage—no inconsiderable item saved to them. Contrary to anticipations, the proceeds were considerable—not so much on account of the number of transactions, as on the high

commission that was charged for the money-orders. Their terms were eightpence for every pound ; but if the sum exceeded two pounds, a stamp-duty of one shilling was levied by Government in addition. No order could be issued for more than five guineas ; and the charge for that sum amounted to four shillings and sixpence, or nearly five per cent. When it is considered that the expense did not end here, but that a letter containing a money-order was subjected to *double postage*, it cannot be wondered at that those who dealt with the three monopolists were few in number, and only persons under a positive necessity to remit money speedily. Such a system, it will be admitted, could not of itself be expected to foster trade. When the general public were admitted to the benefits of the Money-order Office—as they were some few years after the establishment of the office—it does not appear that the business was greatly increased. Almost from the commencement, the managers drew yearly proceeds, which varied but slightly from year to year, averaging about 200*l.* each. While, on the one hand, this office was seen to be a most useful institution, good in principle, and likely, if properly managed, to contribute largely to the general revenue of the Post-office ; on the other hand, it was clearly stationary, if not retrograde in its movements. In 1834, the attention of practical men was more immediately called to the question by a return which was asked for by the House of Commons, for a detailed account of the poundage, &c. on money-orders of each provincial post-office, and the purpose or purposes to which the monies were applied. The Postmaster-General replied, that the Money-order Office was a private establishment, worked by private capital, under his sanction ; but he could give no returns, because the accounts were not under his control. In 1838, Lord Lichfield, being Postmaster-General, obtained the consent of the Treasury to convert the Office into a branch under his immediate direction. In that year the chief Money-order Office commenced business in two small rooms at the north end of St. Martin's-le-Grand, with a staff of three clerks. Though the charges were reduced to a commission of sixpence for sums under two pounds, and of one shilling and sixpence for sums up to five pounds, and although as a further concession the order was printed on a sheet of paper upon which the letter

could be written, thus rendering the letter liable to but a single rate of postage, the new branch was worked at a loss. After the introduction of penny postage, the change was so marked, however, that the immense success of this branch of operations may be considered as entirely owing to the reduction of postage-rates. Had the penny-postage scheme, therefore, done no more for the nation than assisted the people in the exercise of a timely prudence and frugality, it would have done much. But we are anticipating an important era. Soon after the passing of the Penny-postage Act, the commission on money-orders was reduced to threepence in place of sixpence, and sixpence for any amount above two and under five pounds. In 1840, the number of money-order transactions had increased to thousands, in the place of hundreds under the old *régime*. The money passed through the office in the advent year of cheap postage amounted to nearly half a million sterling, the Post-office commission on the sum exceeding 6,000*l*. The rate of increase, subsequently, may be best shown by taking a month's work ten years afterwards. Thus, during one month of 1850, twice as many orders were taken out and paid as were issued and paid during the year 1840, the particulars of which year we have given above. The same rate of increase has continued up to the present moment. During the year 1863, the number of orders had, in round numbers, risen to more than seven and a half millions, or a money-value exceeding sixteen millions sterling, the commission on the whole amounting to more than one hundred and forty-four thousand pounds.<sup>1</sup>

By the statute of Queen Anne, letters might be brought from abroad by *private ships* under certain distinctly-specified regulations. On the contrary, no law existed enabling the Post-master-General to *send* bags of letters by the same medium until 1799, when an Act was passed with this object. Masters of such ships refusing to take bags were subjected to heavy penalties.<sup>2</sup> The postage of letters so sent (on account of the

<sup>1</sup> These items are exclusive of those relating to colonial money-orders.

<sup>2</sup> The Government can grant a release to any ship fixed for this service. It will be remembered by many readers that after the *Peterhoff* was taken by Admiral Wilkes of the United States' Navy, February, 1863, the proprietors of the vessel, who had other ships on the same line (with which the Post-office sent ship-letters), asked the Government for the protection of a mail-officer. On

slowness of transit in the majority of cases) was fixed at half the usual rates. This Act is the foundation of the ship-letter system, by means of which, besides the regular packet communication, letters are forwarded to all parts of the world. At the same period the Government rigorously adhered to the law as laid down with regard to letters *brought* by private vessels. A case was tried in 1806 in the Court of King's Bench—"King v. Wilson"—in which the defendant—a merchant who had had letters brought from the Continent in a ship of his own, and pleaded that he had a right to do so—was cast in heavy damages, and told that "all and every such letters, as well as others," must pass through the Post-office in the usual way.

In the year 1814, the business of the Post-office had increased so greatly, that an agitation was commenced with the object of securing better accommodation for its despatch than was afforded by the office in Lombard Street. The first General Post-office was opened in Cloak Lane, near Dowgate Hill, and removed from thence to the Black Swan in Bishopsgate Street. This office being destroyed by the Great Fire of 1666, a General Office was opened in Covent Garden, but it was soon removed to Lombard Street, to a house which just before had been the residence of Sir Thomas Viner, once Lord Mayor of London.<sup>1</sup> This house was leased from Sir Thomas and his descendants for terms of seven years. Once it was on the point of being bought by the Government, and Sir Christopher Wren inspected the place for that purpose, but the negotiations were suspended owing to a flaw being detected in the title of the owner. In the eighteenth century several expedients were resorted to, to make the place fitted for the increasing work of the office. At one

the principle of choosing the least of two evils, and rather than take such a decisive step, which might lead to troubles with the United States' Government, Earl Russell relieved the *Sea Queen* from the obligation to carry the usual mail-bag to Matamoras.

<sup>1</sup> *The Spectator* (Addison's) No. 462, relates a curious anecdote of Sir Robert Viner, happening at his house during his mayoralty, when he was honoured, as the custom was, with the presence of "the merry monarch." His Majesty was for retiring after staying the usual time, but his worship, "filled with good liquor and loyalty," laid hold of the king and swore, "Sire, you shall take the other bottle!" The good-natured king is said to have looked kindly at him over his shoulder, "and with a smile and graceful air to have repeated the line of the old song, 'He that's drunk is as great as a king,' and turning back complied with his landlord's commands."

period the adjoining house was taken and thrown into the office;<sup>1</sup> and at the expiration of many of the recurring leases, several hundreds of pounds were spent in improvements. It was fully a century and a half before we find any move made for a change from the cramped, ill-regulated, ill-ventilated building to one more suitable to the growing requirements of the service. Nothing, indeed, can better show the stationary character of the Post-office operations—stationary compared to the movements which the present age has seen inaugurated—than the fact, that year by year, and for so many years, the Post-office authorities contrived to do their work within the walls of this place.

In 1813, however, it was proposed that a large and commodious building should be specially erected in some central part of the city. In the session of 1814, we find a Mr. Butterworth presenting a petition to the House of Commons, from four thousand London merchants, in favour of an early removal of the Post-office from Lombard Street. He was assured, he said, that the present office “was so close and confined, as to be injurious to the health of those concerned;” he further stated, that “two guineas were expended weekly for vinegar to fumigate the rooms, and prevent infectious fevers.” Another member stated that the access to the office was so narrow and difficult, that the mail-coaches were prevented from getting up to it to take the letter-bags. Nor were other advocates needed out of parliament. “Important as the concerns of this establishment,” says one author,<sup>2</sup> “are to a commercial nation like our own, the edifice can merit no praise as a building. It is a national reproach,” continues our writer, in language none the clearest, “when edifices of this kind, which, from our great mercantile concerns, afford occasion for a display of public architecture and ornament to the metropolis, are lost to those purposes.” It is curious to note, that even the proposal for this desirable change was contested very keenly. The Post-office authorities do not seem to

<sup>1</sup> The letter to the Treasury recommending this course sets forth, “that the officers being more numerous by reason of the great increase of the revenue and the business of the office; considering also the unseasonable time wherein their attendance is constantly required, we think it necessary that as many as can should have lodging in and about the office.”

<sup>2</sup> *Microcosm of London*, vol. ii. p. 230.

have shown any anxiety for change ; whilst counter-petitions were presented to Parliament, stating that the Lombard Street office was convenient enough, and that the movement was got up by interested parties. Several years passed before the discussions ended and preliminary arrangements were made. In 1825, however, Government acquiesced in the views of the majority of London residents, and St. Martin's-le-Grand—the site of an ancient convent and sanctuary—was chosen for a large, new building, to be erected from designs by Sir R. Smirke. It was five years in course of erection, and opened for the transaction of business on the 25th of September, 1829. The building is of the Grecian-Ionic order, and is one of the handsomest public structures in London. The basement is of granite, but the edifice itself, which is 400 feet in length and 80 feet in width, is built of brick, faced all round with Portland stone. In the centre is a grand portico with fluted columns, leading to the great hall, which forms a public thoroughfare from St. Martin's-le-Grand to Foster Lane.

From the date of the opening of the new General Post-office, improvements were proposed and carried out very earnestly. Under the Duke of Richmond, reforms in the establishment set in with considerable vigour.<sup>1</sup> He seems to have been the first Postmaster-General during the present century who thought the accommodation which the Post-office gave to the public was really of a restrictive nature ; that more facility might easily be given to the public ; and that the system of management was an erroneous one. In 1834, the Duke of Richmond submitted a list of improvements to the Treasury Lords, in which there were at least thirty substantial measures of reform proposed. It is true that many of these measures had been strongly recommended to him by the Commissioners of Revenue Inquiry, who had sat yearly on the Post-office and other revenue branches of the public service. The previous policy, however, of the

<sup>1</sup> The Duke of Richmond, though opposed to the Reform Bill, was a member of Lord Grey's Cabinet. Indefatigable in the service of the department over which he was placed from 1830 to 1834, he refused at first to accept of any remuneration of the nature of salary. In compliance, it is stated, with the strong representation of the Treasury Lords, as to the objectionable nature of the principle of gratuitous services by public officers, "which must involve in many cases the sacrifice of private fortune to official station," His Grace consented to draw his salary *from that time only*.

authorities was to put on a bold front against any recommendations not originating with themselves. The Duke of Richmond had considerably less of this feeling than some of his predecessors. Thus, to take the principal measure of reform concluded in his time—namely, the complete amalgamation of the Scotch and Irish offices with the English Post-office—we find that the twenty-third report of the Commissioners, signed by “Wallace,” W. J. Lushington, Henry Berens, and J. P. Dickenson, spoke strongly on the inadequacy “of the present system of administration to reach the different parts of the country,” and urging the expediency “of providing against any more conflict of opinion, and of securing a more extended co-operation, as well as unity of design, in the management of the distinct offices of England, Scotland, and Ireland.” Again, in 1831, on the recommendation of the Commission, the Postmaster-General ordered that the boundaries of the London district post—which, in 1801, became a “Twopenny Post,” and letters for which post, if delivered beyond the boundaries of the cities of London and Westminster and the borough of Southwark, were charged threepence—should now be extended to include all places within *three* miles of the General Post-office. Two years afterwards, on the recommendation of another Commission, the limits of the “Twopenny Post” were again extended to places not exceeding *twelve* miles from St. Martin’s-le-Grand, and this arrangement continued till the time of uniform penny postage. The Duke of Richmond likewise appointed a daily post to France, established a number of new mail-coaches, and abolished, in great part, the system of paying the clerks, &c. of the Post-office by fees, substituting fixed salaries in each case.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The salary of the Secretary to the Post-office in the last century was 600*l.* a year, and a commission of 2½ per cent. on the produce of the mail-packets. —(Vide *Pitt’s Speeches*, vol. i. pp. 53–55, Debate of June 17, 1783.) In 1830 the Secretary’s salary was 500*l.* a year, but what with compensations, fees, and other emoluments, his annual income is stated to have amounted to no less than 4,560*l.*—(*Mirror of Parliament*, 1835.) The clerks, according to a Parliamentary return, were paid small salaries, regulated on different scales, but their income consisted principally of emoluments derived from other sources. The *established* allowances, charged on the public revenue, consisted of sums for postage, stationery, payment in lieu of apartments, and for continuing indexes to official books. The remaining emoluments, of course not chargeable against the revenue, arose from fees on deputations, commissions, expresses, profits on the publication of the *Shipping and Packet*

In 1830, on the opening of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway, the mails of the district were consigned to the new company for transmission. The railway system developed but slowly, exerting little influence on Post-office arrangements for the first few years. After public attention had been attracted to railways, many proposals were thrown out for the more quick transmission of mails, to the supersession of the mail-coach. One writer suggested the employment of balloons. Professor Babbage threw out suggestions, in his *Economy of Machinery and Manufactures*, 1832, pp. 218—221, deserving more attention, because in them we see shadowed forth two at least of the greatest enterprises of our time. After proceeding to show, in a manner which must have been interesting to the post-reformers of 1839-40, that if the cost of letter-carrying could be reduced, the result might be (if the Post-office people chose) a cheaper rate of postage and a corresponding increase in the number of letters, he proceeded to expound a scheme which, though vague, was described in words extremely interesting, seeing that he wrote long anterior to the time of the electric telegraph. Imagine, says he, a series of high pillars erected at frequent intervals, as nearly as possible in a straight line between two post-towns. An iron or steel wire of some thickness must be stretched over proper supports, fixed on these pillars, and terminating at the end, say of four or five miles, in a very strong support, by which the whole may be stretched. He proposed to call each of these places station-houses, where a man should be in attendance. A narrow cylindrical tin case, to contain bags or letters, might be suspended on two wheels rolling upon the wire, whilst an endless wire of smaller size might be made to pass over two drums, one at each end, by which means the cylinder could be moved by the person at the station. Much more of the details follow, and Mr. Babbage thus concludes:—"The difficulties are obvious; but if these were overcome, it would present many advantages besides velocity." We might have *two or three deliveries of letters<sup>1</sup> every day*; we might send expresses at any moment;

*Lists*, payments for franking letters on the business of the Land-Tax Redemption, and for the Tax-office, &c. and from Lloyd's Coffee-House for shipping-intelligence, &c. There were, besides, other gratuities for special services.

<sup>1</sup> We give the following simply to show the vagaries of clever, scientific men. Speaking of London, the then Professor said: "Perhaps if the steeples



"and it is not impossible that a stretched wire might itself be made available for a species of *telegraphic communication* yet more rapid." After the first few years of railways, however, all other speculators quietly withdrew into the shade. In the Post-office, towards 1838, the influence of railways promised soon to be paramount; so much so, that it was already considered indispensable that Parliament should discuss that influence. Hence it was that in 1838, Acts were passed "to provide for the conveyance of mails by railways." The Post-office underwent many minor transitions from 1810 to 1840, but the change in the system of mail conveyance was, whether viewed in itself, or in relation to its subsequent effects on the postal system, by far the most important. On June 14, 1838, Mr. Labouchere brought in a bill to convey mails by railway, founded on the result of the Committee of Inquiry which was appointed at the beginning of that session. "The Post-office," said the Vice-President of the Board of Trade, "was obliged to have recourse to railways, or suspend operations; the iron roads had already put a stop to most of the stage-coach traffic on the principal roads."<sup>1</sup> One clause of the Bill provided for the employment of arbitrators to endeavour to secure the services of railways on equitable terms. At first, but one arbitrator was employed to negotiate between the Post-office and the companies; subsequently, however, one was nominated from each of the two great interests. Sir James Graham took exception to this provision, moving a declaratory clause, however, that the arbitrators should take into consideration the cost of the construction of the particular lines, in awarding the sums for different services. Mr. Labouchere, speaking for the Government, wished the arbitrators to be wholly free and with a perfect right to enter into such inquiries as they might deem necessary to enable them to make their award. He thought it would require very special circumstances to justify the original cost of construction being taken into consideration. The wish of the

of churches, properly selected, were made use of—as, for instance, St. Paul's—and if a similar apparatus were placed at the top of each steeple, and a man to work it during the day, it might be possible to diminish the expense of the twopenny post, and make deliveries every half-hour over the greater part of the metropolis." P. 221.

<sup>1</sup> *Hansard*, vol. xliii. June, 1838.

Government was, that the whole question should be left to the decision of fair and honourable men.<sup>1</sup> Sir James Graham was satisfied, and would further state that if, from a system of unfair dealing on the part of the railway companies, they sought to obtain any undue advantages, no member of the House would be more ready to join with the Government in adopting the strongest measures to compel them to be just. It is a matter of some importance to remember that no proper provision for the mails was made on the first railway Bills being passed, and that this course was soon afterwards regretted by all sides of the House. Mr. Wallace, of Kelly, whose name will frequently come up in subsequent pages in connexion with postal reforms, was loud in his regrets. The Vice-President of the Board of Trade agreed that the House had "originally legislated blindly and rashly on the subject of railways." Sir Robert Peel, leading the Opposition, went quite as far, acknowledging "the enormous error" into which he and the House generally "had fallen, when the railroad Bills were under discussion. They ought to have foreseen," said he, "when these Bills were before them, that they were in fact establishing a monopoly,—a monopoly in respect to which there could be no future condition. They ought to have foreseen that, if the railroads were successful, other modes of internal communication would almost necessarily fall into disuse, and they ought, therefore, to have stipulated—as it would have been *perfectly just and easy* for them to have done—that certain public services should be performed at a reasonable rate." However, as this had not been done, Parliament could only fall back upon its inherent right to say on what terms such services should be provided from time to time; for which purposes, he thought, they could not do better than employ arbitration, as this was the course pursued when the companies disputed with the owners of property the value of land compulsorily taken for railway works.

About the same time, Mr. Labouchere moved that the laws regulating the Post-office be consolidated, and that the criminal laws in force in England and Ireland be assimilated. In Ireland, robbing the mail-coach was punishable with death; in England with transportation. It was requisite that in this and all other

<sup>1</sup> *Hansard*, vol. xlv. p. 481. July 21, 1838.

matters of the kind, the law should be the same throughout the British Isles. Mr. Wallace seconded the motion, for he was convinced that it was one of the most beneficial measures that had been brought before the House for a long time.<sup>1</sup>

In 1836, Sir Francis Freeling, the Secretary of the Post-office, died, when his place was filled by Lieutenant-Colonel Maberly. The latter gentleman, who is described as having been an entire stranger to the office, was introduced into the department by the Treasury, for the purpose, as it was stated, of zealously carrying out the reforms which the eighth Commission of Post-office Inquiry had recommended.<sup>2</sup> On the premature fall of Sir Robert Peel's first Cabinet, early in the previous year, the Earl of Lichfield had succeeded to the office of Postmaster-General, under Lord Melbourne. The two new officers set to work in earnest, and succeeded in inaugurating many important reforms. They got the Money-order Office transferred, as we have already seen, from private hands to the General Establishment; they began the system of registering valuable letters; and, taking advantage of one of Mr. Hill's suggestions, they started a number of day-mails to the provinces. Towards the close of 1836, the stamp duty on newspapers was reduced from about threepence-farthing net to one penny, a reduction which led to an enormous increase in the number of newspapers passing through the Post-office.

Though all these improvements were being carried out, and in many respects the Post-office was showing signs of progression, the authorities still clung with a most unreasonable tenacity to the accustomed rates of postage, and of necessity to all the evils which followed in the train of an erroneous fiscal principle. Contrary to all experience in any other department, the Government obstinately refused to listen for a moment to any plan for the reduction of postage rates, or, what is still more remarkable, even to the alleviation of burdens caused directly by the official arrangements of the period. For example, Colonel Maberly had no sooner learnt the business of his office, than he saw very clearly an anomaly which pressed heavily in some cases, and was

<sup>1</sup> *Hansard*, vol. xxxix. March, 1837.

<sup>2</sup> Evidence of Colonel Maberly before the *Select Committee on Postage*, 843, p. 170.

felt in all. He at once made a proposition to the Treasury that letters should be charged in all cases according to the exact distance between the places where a letter was posted and where delivered, and not according to the distance through which the Post-office, *for purposes of its own*, might choose to send such letters. It may serve to show the extent to which this strange and anomalous practice was carried, if we state that the estimated reduction in the postal revenue, had Colonel Maberly's suggestion been acted upon, was given at no less than 80,000*l.* annually! The Lords of the Treasury promptly refused the concession.

In 1837, the average general postage was estimated at 9½*d.* per letter; exclusive of foreign letters, it was still as high as 8¾*d.* In the reign of Queen Anne the postage of a letter between London and Edinburgh was less than half as much as the amount charged at the accession of Queen Victoria, with macadamized roads, and even with steam. Notwithstanding the heavy rates, or, let us say, on account of these rates, the net proceeds of the gigantic monopoly of the Post-office remained stationary for nearly twenty years. In 1815 the revenue derivable from the Post-office was estimated at one and a half millions sterling. In 1836, the increase on this amount had only been between three and four thousand pounds, though the population of the country had increased immensely, knowledge was more diffused, and trade and commerce had extended in every direction. Had the Post-office revenue increased, for instance, in the same ratio as population, we should have found the proceeds to have been increased by half a million sterling; or at the ratio of increase of stage-coach travelling, it must have been two millions sterling.

The high rates, while they failed to increase the Post-office revenue, undoubtedly led to the evasion of the postage altogether. Illicit modes of conveyance were got up and patronised by some of the principal merchants in the kingdom. Penal laws were set at defiance, and the number of contraband letters became enormous. Some carriers were doing as large a business as the Post-office itself. On one occasion the agents of the Post-office made a seizure, about this time, of eleven hundred such letters, which were found in a single bag in the warehouse of certain eminent London carriers. The head of the firm hastened to seek an interview with the Postmaster-General, and proffered

instant payment of 500*l.* by way of composition for the penalties incurred, and if proceedings against the firm might not be instituted. The money was taken, and the letters were all passed through the Post-office the same night.<sup>1</sup> For one case which was detected, however, a hundred were never made known. The evasion of the Post-office charges extended so far and so wide that the officials began to declare that any attempt to stop the smuggling, or even to check it, was as good as hopeless. Prosecutions for the illicit conveyance of letters had, in fact, ceased long before the misdemeanours themselves.

The Post-office was now ripe for a sweeping change. Mr. Wallace, the member for Greenock, had frequently called the attention of the House of Commons to the desirability of a thorough reform in the Post-office system. We find him moving at different times for Post-office returns. For instance, in August, 1833, Mr. Wallace<sup>2</sup> brought forward a subject which, he said, "involved a charge of the most serious nature against the Post-office—viz. that the Postmaster-General, or some person acting under his direction, with the view of discovering a fraud upon its revenue, has been guilty of a felony in the opening of letters." He moved on this occasion for a return of all and every instruction, bye-law, or authority, under which postmasters are instructed and authorized, or have assumed a right, to open, unfold, apply strong lamp-light to, or use any of them or any other means whatever, for ascertaining or reading what may be contained in words or in figures in any letter, of any size or description, being fastened with a wafer or wax, or even if totally unfastened by either.<sup>3</sup> "At the same time he moved for a return of all Post-office prosecutions, especially for the

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Matthew Davenport Hill. 1862.

<sup>2</sup> *Mirror of Parliament*. Barrow. 1833.

<sup>3</sup> Now and then the House was enlivened and amused by even Post-office discussions. Thus, in the discussion on the above motion, Mr. Cobbett complained that a letter of his, which "was not only meant to be read, but to be printed," had never been received by him, nor could he get any satisfaction out of the Post-office authorities. He advised all honourable members who had complaints to make against the Post-office, to make them at once to the House, without having any interview with ministers. For his own part, with regard to letters being opened, he felt sure that the Post-office read all the letters it cared to read; so he took care to *write accordingly*. He didn't care about his letters being read, provided they were allowed to go on as he addressed them.

*Mr. Secretary Stanley* (the present Lord Derby) thought it would be a

expenses of a recent case at Stafford. In reply, the Post-office answered in a parliamentary paper that no such instruction had ever been issued from the General Post-office. Every person in the Post-office was required to take the oath prescribed in the Act of 9 Anne, c. 10. It was added, that "whenever it is noticed that a letter has been put into the post unfastened, it is invariably sealed with the official seal for security." In reply to the other return, the Post-office authorities admitted that the cost of prosecuting a woman and girl at the late Stafford assizes exceeded three hundred and twenty pounds.

There can be no question that Mr. Wallace's frequent motions for Post-office papers, returns, statistics, detailed accounts of receipt and expenditure, &c. were the means of drawing special attention to the Post-office, and that they were of incalculable service to the progress of reform and the coming reformer. Mr. Wallace has, indeed, in one quarter at any rate, been credited with the suggestion of the uniform penny rate of postage, but this is simply a mistake and an absurdity; it is, moreover, an honour which he never claimed for himself. In estimating properly the penny post system, and the labours of those who succeeded, under the greatest opposition and fiercest antagonism, in carrying that measure, the share which Mr. Wallace of Kelly had in it should never be lost sight of: still he never contemplated more than a great reduction of postage rates—for instance, a minimum charge of threepence, and a maximum rate of ninepence—until another reformer arose, to whom he freely offered all his energies. Mr. Wallace's generalizations, as well as his want of any properly defined and detailed scheme, were often caustically referred to at the time. That he lacked the requisite powers of organization there can be little doubt. Though honest and straightforward, he was hasty, very blunt and outspoken, and never attempted to conciliate his opponents. His tongue

subject of deep regret that any negligence on the part of the Post-office had prevented the elaborate lucubrations of the hon. member for Oldham from appearing in the *Register* on the appointed Saturday.

*Mr. Cobbett.* It never appeared at all.

Mr. Secretary Stanley was grieved. He felt sure, however, that the hon. member spent too much time over the midnight oil not to have kept a copy of his precious essay. He protested against hon. members taking up the time of the House with complaints against a department which managed its work very well.

led him into several troubles, out of which he can scarcely be said to have come scathless. In 1835, for example, he stated in the House that the Postmaster-General, as well as the Chancellor of the Exchequer, were completely under the thumb of Sir Francis Freeling; that they "were, in fact, the apprentices of the Post-office Secretary." Mr. Wallace was handled unmercifully in the House of Lords by all the peers who had held the office. Lord William Lennox, in the Lower House, would ask if anything could justify Mr. Wallace in calling Sir Francis, whom he and others eulogized,<sup>1</sup> "Postmaster-General?" "I never take up my papers in the morning," added this honourable lord, "that I do not find the name of the hon. member for Greenock there with some motion for inquiry with respect to the Post-office. I wish to God that the hon. member would bring forward that inquiry at once in some tangible shape, instead of indulging in vague generalities and mere declamation." Though Lord Lennox spoke in the fraternal interest—the Duke of Richmond being at the head of the Post-office—yet he evidently gave expression to the prevailing feeling at the time. In 1837, Mr. Wallace was again in hot water. Lord Lichfield in the House of Lords strongly animadverted on some statements made by "the individual who had particularly applied himself to the subject," and characterized them, not without some show of reason, as "scandalous and infamous libels." Mr. Wallace

<sup>1</sup> Sir Francis Freeling, an old and experienced officer, was held in great respect by all who knew him. A Tory of the oldest and most rigid school, he was well known as an able man and a generous patron of art and literature. Who that has seen it but remembers the dedication of Hood's first *Comic Annual* to Sir Francis, written in Hood's own incomparable style? We cannot refrain from giving it entire:—

TO SIR FRANCIS FREELING, BART.

the Great Patron of Letters, Foreign, General, and Two-penny; distinguished alike for his fostering care of the

BELL LETTERS;

and his antiquarian care for the

DEAD LETTERS;

whose increasing efforts to forward the spread of intelligence as Corresponding Member of All Societies (and no man fills his Post better) have

SINGLY, DOUBLY, AND TREBLY

endeared him to every class; this first volume of *The Comic Annual* is with Frank permission, gratefully inscribed by

THOMAS HOOD.

had complained of a letter and petition not having reached him from Edinburgh, and he publicly hinted that they had been purposely kept back. Afterwards he found them, and honestly wrote to the Post-office saying that the letter had been received: "This individual," continued the Earl, "had, in consequence of his mind being occupied by a multiplicity of business, carelessly thrown it aside." He complained of the seals of his letters having been broken, and Lord Lichfield showed how "they were sealed in the most peculiar manner; the mere dropping of them in the letter-box was proved to be sufficient to fracture the seals." It is not difficult, therefore, to understand the position which Mr. Wallace filled in relation to the subject, nor is it likely that he would ever have been able to do more than he did. Whatever may have been said to the contrary, his motives were pure and honest,<sup>1</sup> and his diligence and attention to Post-office matters were enormous. As *avant courier* to a wiser and milder man, Mr. Wallace did great and important, if somewhat thankless services, but he had neither the ingenuity to devise, nor the patient, cautious, watchful zeal necessary to the advocacy and the completion of the comprehensive scheme that was required.

<sup>1</sup> The *Quarterly Review* (October, 1839), speaking about his motions for different papers, goes on to say: "What *grounds* he had for making them could only be imagined. They were, in fact, the kind of random motions with which a member *fishes for abuses, but is still more anxious to catch notoriety.*" The italics are not ours.



## CHAPTER X.

## SIR ROWLAND HILL AND PENNY POSTAGE.

MISS MARTINEAU, in her history of the *Thirty Years' Peace*, narrates a somewhat romantic incident to account for Mr. Hill's original relation to our subject, tracing the fiscal reform with which his name is indissolubly connected to the "neighbourly shilling" well laid out of a "pedestrian traveller in the Lake District." Unluckily for the historian, the incident never happened to Mr. Hill. The repeated motions of Mr. Wallace in the House of Commons are proved beyond dispute to have brought home the subject to the consideration of many thoughtful minds, and amongst those, to one who had scholarly leisure and philosophical ingenuity to bring to its service.

Born in 1795, and for many years a tutor in his father's school near Birmingham, Mr. Rowland Hill was, at this time, the secretary of the Commissioners for conducting the Colonization of South Australia, upon the plan of Mr. Edward Gibbon Wakefield. At this post, according to the testimony of the commissioners themselves, Mr. Hill laboured unweariedly, "evincing," as they said, "considerable powers of organization." Mr. Hill, in one place,<sup>1</sup> gives a clear account of the way he prepared himself for the work he took in hand, when once his attention was arrested by the subject. "The first thing I did was to read very carefully all the reports on Post-office subjects. I then put myself in communication with the hon. member for Greenock, who kindly afforded me much assistance, and then applied to the Post-office for information, with which Lord Lichfield was so good as to supply me. These were the means I took to make myself acquainted with the subject." In January, 1837, Mr. Hill published the results of his investigations, embodying his scheme in a pamphlet entitled *Post-office Reform* :

<sup>1</sup> *Select Committee of Postage*, 1843, p. 133.

*its Importance and Practicability.* This, the first edition, was circulated privately among the principal members of the Legislature and official men ; the second edition, published two months afterwards, being the first given to the world. The pamphlet, of which we must here attempt to give some account, created an immediate sensation ; most people were struck with the novelty of its views ; the more thoughtful saw at once the evident care and attention that had been bestowed on the subject, and the general soundness of the conclusions arrived at. In the mercantile world especially, Mr. Hill's proposals were at once understood, eagerly adopted, and spread rapidly. Mr. Hill may be said to have started with the fact to which we have already adverted in the previous chapter, namely, that the Post-office was not progressing as it ought, and like other great interests ; that its revenue from 1815 to 1835 had remained quite stationary, though there was at the latter period an additional population of six millions, and though the increase in trade and commerce had been proportionate with the increase of population. Again, the increase in the ratio of stage-coach travellers made the case still more clear. Had the duties on postage increased in the same proportion as the duty on stage-coach travelling, the sum of two millions sterling would have been added to the postal revenue each year. Though a smart Quarterly Reviewer answered this argument by saying that the more men travelled, the less need was there for writing, it is easy to demonstrate the falsity of the position from present experience, and to show, that had the old principles of postage been true, the Post-office revenue should have advanced as rapidly as the analogous duty on stage-coaches. Mr. Hill then went on to show that the principle of high rates of postage was an erroneous one ; that it affected in a most material way other branches of revenue ; he maintained the counter principle (which has made rapid progress since his time), that reducing the taxes on certain goods does not necessarily occasion a reduction in the public revenue, but that the reduction would often lead to increased consumption of the articles in question. As an illustration, he gave the case of the malt-tax, which reduced 28 per cent, had only resulted in a diminution of revenue to the extent of 2½ per cent. He adduced other cases of remission of taxation, and also

one or two cases where postage rates had been reduced with the same results.

From the data which Mr. Hill was enabled to gather—for accounts of any sort were not kept so accurately at the Post-office then as now, and there were no accounts of the number of inland letters—he estimated the number of letters passing through the Post-office; and we may remark, that considering the meagreness of the statistical information at his disposal, his estimates were made up with wonderful accuracy and ingenuity, and required little subsequent alteration. Having got the number of letters and the total amount of revenue received from them, he made a rough calculation, which, though rough, came very near the mark, that the average charge per letter was  $6\frac{1}{2}d$ . He then tried to ascertain the expenses of management. This cost he divided into two heads, the primary and secondary distribution, and showed that the cost of receiving and delivering the letters, and also the cost of transit, took two-thirds of the total cost of the management of the Post-office. Of this sum, the amount which had to do with the *distance* letters were conveyed, Mr. Hill calculated at 144,000*l*. out of the total postal expenditure of 700,000*l*. Applying to this smaller sum the estimated number of letters—deducting franks and taking into account the greater weight of newspapers—he gave the apparent *average* cost of conveying each letter as less than one-tenth of a penny. The conclusion to which he came from this calculation of the average cost of transit was inevitable, and that was, that if the charge must be made proportionate (except, forsooth, it could be shown how the postage of one tenth or one thirty-sixth of a penny could be collected) it must clearly be uniform, and for the sake of argument, and not considering the charge as a tax, or as a tax whose end was drawing near, any packet of an equal weight might be sent throughout the length and breadth of the country at precisely the same rate.

The justice and propriety of a uniform rate was further shown, but in a smaller degree, by the fact that the relative cost of transmission of letters under the old system was not always dependent on the distance the mails were carried. Thus, the Edinburgh mail, the longest and most important of all, cost 5*l*. for each journey. Calculating the proportionate weight of bags,

letters, and newspapers, Mr. Hill<sup>1</sup> arrived at the absolute cost of carrying a newspaper of an average weight of  $1\frac{1}{2}$  oz. at one sixth of a penny, and that of a letter of an average weight of  $\frac{1}{4}$  oz. at one thirty-sixth of a penny. These sums being the full cost for the whole distance, Mr. Hill assumed, fairly enough, that the same rating would do for any place on the road. It was admitted on all hands, that the chief labour was expended in making up, opening, and delivering the mails ; therefore the fact whether it was carried one mile or a hundred made comparatively little difference in the expenditure of the office. The expenses and trouble being much the same, perhaps *even less* at Edinburgh than at some intermediate point, why should the charges be so different ? But the case could be made still stronger. The mail for Louth, containing as it did comparatively few letters, cost the Post-office authorities, as the simple expense of transit, one penny-farthing per letter. Thus, an Edinburgh letter, costing the Post-office an infinitesimal fraction of a farthing, was charged one shilling and three-halfpence to the public, while a letter for Louth, costing the Post-office fifty times as much, was charged to the public at the rate of tenpence ! Nothing was clearer, therefore, that if Mr. Hill's propositions were opposed, and his opponents did not advocate the payment according to the actual cost of transit, those who were adverse to them must fall into the absurdity of recognising as just an arrangement which charged the highest price for the cheapest business ! At first sight it looked extravagant, that persons residing at Penzance or near the Giant's Causeway, at Watford or Wick, should pay equal postage for their letters. The intrinsic *value* of the conveyance of a letter, it must be admitted, is a very different thing from its *cost*, the value being exactly equal to the time, trouble, and expense saved to the correspondents, of which, perhaps, the only *measure* appeared to be the actual distance. Looked at more narrowly, however, in the clear light of Mr. Hill's investigations, it became obvious that it was really "a nearer approximation to perfect justice"<sup>2</sup> to allow distant places to feel the benefits of the measure, passing over the little

<sup>1</sup> *Post-office Reform*, p. 14, third edition.

<sup>2</sup> *Our Exemplars. Poor and Rich*, edited by Matthew Davenport Hill. London, 1851, p. 317.

inequalities to which it might give rise, while all might pay such a sum as would cover the expenses in each and every case.<sup>1</sup>

Having laid his foundation on this broad basis, he went on to show that the high rates of postage were so excessive (not only varied according to distance, but doubled and tripled if there were enclosures, and charged with fourfold postage if the letter exceeded an ounce in weight), as greatly to diminish, where they did not absolutely prevent, correspondence. Not only so, but the high rate created an illicit traffic, involving all classes of the country in the meshes of a systematically clandestine trade. Nor was this all. The expenses of the department might be much reduced by simplifications in the various processes. The existing system resulted in a complicated system of accounts, involving great waste of time, as well as offering inducements to fraud. The daily work of exposing letters to a strong light, in order to see the number of its enclosures, also offered a constant temptation to the violation of the first duty of the officers of the

<sup>1</sup> *The Westminster Review*, July, 1860, p. 78, in an able but exceedingly *ex parte* article on "The Post-office Monopoly," doubts whether Mr. Hill's system is a near approximation to perfect justice, being, in its opinion, "by no means the *summum bonum* of letter-rates." "A charge of one penny for the carriage of all letters of a certain *weight* within the United Kingdom, irrespective of distance, is eminently arbitrary." . . . "No one in London who has written two letters, one to a friend residing in the same town as himself, and another to one in Edinburgh, can have failed, in affixing the stamps to them, to observe the unfairness of charging the same sum for carrying the one 400 yards and the other 400 miles, when the cost of transmission must in the one case be so much more than in the other." These quotations plainly show that Sir Rowland Hill's early arguments have been lost upon the reviewer. If that gentleman demonstrated one thing more plainly than another, it was that the absolute cost of the transmission of each letter was so infinitesimally small, that if charged according to that cost, the postage could not be collected. Besides, it is not certain that the one letter would cost the Post-office more than the other. Moreover, to the sender the value of the conveyance of the local letter was equal to its cost, or he would have forwarded it by other means. No doubt a strong argument might be based on some such grounds as these, as to the justice of a *lower* rate for letters posted and delivered in the same town. Such a measure might be supported on Sir Rowland Hill's own principles; but the apparent anomaly is surely no argument against a State monopoly of letter-carrying. It is only fair to add—though at the same time it is also curious—that in a paper in the present number of the *Westminster* (January, 1865) on "Railways," Sir Rowland Hill meets with cordial praise and recognition as a true reformer; the principle of penny postage is *de facto* commended; and the success of the measure is adduced as an argument for the formation of a gigantic system of monopoly in railways!

State in respect to the sanctity of correspondence. If, instead of charging letters according to the number of sheets or scraps of paper, a weight were fixed, below which, whatever the contents of the letters, a certain rate were charged, much trouble would be saved to the office, not to speak of the principle being more just. Then, again, a great loss of time was experienced in the mode of collecting the postage from door to door as the letters were delivered, each letter-carrier being detained on the average two minutes at every house ; and not only so, but check-clerks and check-accounts had to be kept at the Post-office of the amounts thus sent out. Mr. Hill went on to show how a great economization of labour might be effected by some system of prepayment by means of stamps or stamped covers, which could be easily managed provided the postage rates were made uniform ; while, if the public would construct letter-boxes in their doors, the existing staff might easily distribute four or five times the number of letters they were then able to deliver.

Mr. Hill, in his able pamphlet, exhausted the subject. All the facts to which we have just adverted, and their results on the public revenue, shine out here as clear as noonday. By a variety of striking arguments, he urged upon the nation a trial of his plans—begged for an unobstructed and cheap circulation of letters, expressing his most deliberate conviction that the Post-office, “ rendered feeble and inefficient by erroneous financial arrangements,” was “ capable of performing a distinguished part in the great work of national education,” that it might and would become “ a new and powerful engine of civilization,” and thus be made a benefaction and blessing to mankind. He left the following proposals to the deliberate judgment of the nation :—1. A large diminution in the rates of postage, say even to one penny per letter weighing not more than half an ounce. 2. Increased speed in the delivery of letters. 3. More frequent opportunities for the despatch of letters. And 4. Simplification in the operations of the Post-office, with the object of economy in the management. The grand, yet simple foundation of the new scheme, was, of course, the proposal that the rate of postage should be low and uniform, and charged according to weight.

No wonder that the scheme, of which, in our own order, we have

just attempted an outline, roused feelings of delight and approbation from the people at large throughout the length and breadth of the land. Still less is it a matter of surprise that the Government and the Post-office authorities, in charge of the revenue, should stand aghast at the prospect of being called upon to sanction what they considered so suicidal a policy. We are not left in doubt as to what the authorities thought of the scheme when it was first proposed. Three months after the publication of the pamphlet, Lord Lichfield, the Postmaster-General, speaking as to its practicability, described the proposal in the House of Lords,<sup>1</sup> "of all the wild and visionary schemes which I have ever heard of, it is the most extravagant." Six months afterwards he is still willing to endorse all he said in June: "Since I made those observations I have given the subject considerable attention, and I remain even still more firmly of the same opinion."<sup>2</sup> Colonel Maberly spoke even more decidedly: he thought it "a most preposterous plan, utterly unsupported by facts, resting entirely on assumptions." The revenue was first thought of. Lord Lichfield told the House of Lords that no man regretted more than himself that the plan could not be followed; it would so materially affect the revenue. The Duke of Richmond, always entitled to respect when he spoke of Post-office matters, thought "a reduction of postage was greatly needed," but he could not see his way clear, "on the score of public revenue, to urge the adoption of the plan as it stood."<sup>3</sup> Lord Brougham, with that clear-sighted vision and quick comprehension for which he has always been so remarkable, took the opportunity to say that nothing he had heard from either noble duke or noble earl had in the least degree shaken his opinion as to the utility and feasibility of Mr. Hill's plan. Nor did the Ex-Lord Chancellor ever waver for a moment or relax in his exertions to second the labours of the reformer. The Post-office authorities at first argued that the letters would not increase at all in the proportion stated, and that therefore the primary element to a successful issue was more than doubtful. Mr. Godby, of the Irish Post-office, said

<sup>1</sup> *Hansard*, vol. xxxvii. June, 1837.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* vol. xxxix. Nov. 1837.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 376—373.

he did not think "any human being living would ever see such an increase of letters as would make up the loss" by the proposed reductions. Even, however, supposing the letters do increase as Mr. Hill estimates, they argued, what will be the certain result if that increase should be realized? "The mails," said Lord Lichfield on a subsequent occasion in the House, "will have to carry twelve times as much in weight, and therefore the charge for transmission, instead of 100,000*l.* as now, must be twelve times that amount. The walls of the Post-office would burst; the whole area in which the building stands would not be large enough to receive the clerks and letters." Nor were the Post-office authorities the only opposers of the scheme; at first few members of the Legislature took the matter up warmly. Many well-known names were ranked in decided opposition, some contending that the plans, among other drawbacks, would not only absorb the existing revenue, but would have to be supported by a ruinous subsidy from the Exchequer. But a valiant and courageous few in such a just and reasonable reform were a host in themselves. Some of the most intelligent statesmen of the day, including men like Lord Brougham and the late Lord Ashburton, were inclined to go even so far as to advocate the sacrifice of revenue altogether—believing, as the latter expressed it, that the postage of letters ought not to be made the subject of a tax at all<sup>1</sup>—rather than not have the reform. An immense number of thoughtful people believed, however (and Mr. Hill seems to have shared in this belief), that any diminution which should result at first from the adoption of the plans would only be temporary, and should be regarded as an *outlay*, which, in the course of years, would yield enormous profits. "Suppose even an average yearly loss of a million for ten years," said an able writer in the *Edinburgh Review*,<sup>2</sup> "it is but half what the country has paid for the abolition of slavery, without the possibility of any money return. Treat the deficit as an outlay of capital. Even if the hope of ultimate profit should altogether fail, let us recur to some other tax . . . any tax but this, certain that none can operate so fatally on all the other

<sup>1</sup> "This is the *worst* of our taxes," said Lord Ashburton; "you might as well tax words spoken on the Royal Exchange."

<sup>2</sup> *Edinburgh Review*, vol. lxx. p. 545.



sources of revenue. Letters are the *primordia rerum* of the commercial world. To tax them at all is condemned by those who are best acquainted with the operations of finance." Nor was Mr. Hill to be cried down. He had an opportunity of speaking again on the publication of the third edition of his pamphlet. He admitted, as we have before said, that his plans, if carried out, would result in a diminution of revenue for a few years to come. On the reliable *data* which he had collected, he calculated that this decrease might extend, at first, to as much as 300,000*l.* per annum; but that the scheme would pay in the long run, and pay handsomely, he had no manner of doubt. Again, the letters would certainly increase; if the flood-gates of correspondence were thus opened, it was not reasonable to suppose that the stream would not flow freely and fully: yet still the increase would not be so enormous as to swamp all the existing appliances, nor would it be less than what would be requisite to show that this movement was one ardently wished for by all classes of the population.

One of the first results of the publication of Mr. Hill's pamphlet, was the formation of the "Mercantile Committee" in London in 1837. This committee—composed of a number of the most influential merchants and bankers in London,<sup>1</sup> with the late Mr. Bates, of the house of Baring & Co. for chairman—was called into existence through the manifested opposition to a reform which was seen at once by them to be sound and reasonable. Their work, to which many of them devoted a great deal of time, was to spread a knowledge of the new plans throughout the community. A thousand pounds were subscribed at once for the purpose of distributing the necessary information, and for the general purposes of the agitation. Like all other large organizations for any kind of reform, the "Mercantile Committee" had its organ in the *Post Circular*, which was published for the sole purpose of conveying correct and important information relative to the progress of the reform, and awakening the general public to a proper sense of its importance.

<sup>1</sup> The following gentlemen were on the committee: Mr. G. Moffat, now M.P. for Honiton; Mr. James Pattison, M.P.; Mr. Jones Loyd (now Lord Overstone); Mr. D. Colvin, Mr. Lindsay Cole, Mr. W. Ellis, Mr. Gladstones, Mr. Larpent, Mr. Wilkinson, and Mr. Lestock Wilson.

On the 9th of May, 1837,<sup>1</sup> Mr. Wallace proposed a Select Committee to go into the question raised by Mr. Hill, and this he did in an able speech. Lord John Russell opposed the motion, hoping "the member for Greenock would withdraw it, to allow the House to proceed with a Bill which was necessary for the peace of Ireland." Mr. T. Duncombe advised the hon. member to postpone his motion, but to persist in it at another time. Mr. Wallace then withdrew it; but the ball had commenced rolling, and there was now no stopping it. Whatever might be said in Parliament, public opinion in the country was most decided on the question, that even if the success of the new scheme was insufficient to cover the charges of the establishment, it ought by all means to be carried out. Scarcely ever was public sympathy so soon and so universally excited in any matter. The progress of the question of post reform was in this, and some other respects, very remarkable, and shows in a strong light how long a kind of extortion may be borne quietly, and then what may be accomplished by prompt and conjoint action. Before Mr. Hill's pamphlet appeared, no complaints reached the Legislature of the high rates of postage. During the year in which it did appear, five petitions reached the Houses of Lords and Commons, praying that its author's scheme might, at least, be considered. In the next year 320, and in the first half of the year 1839 no fewer than 830, petitions were presented in favour of the measure. During the agitation it is calculated that over 2,000 petitions reached St. Stephen's, including 400 from town councils and other public bodies. In November, 1837, the Duke of Richmond presented a petition from Scotland in favour of the scheme, and expressed the opinion we have already given. On the same occasion, Lord Brougham presented one from London merchants, and took the opportunity to make one of his able speeches. A month afterwards he presented another from the Lord Mayor and Corporation, and said that they had the capacity beyond most men of examining the particulars and principles of such a plan. They had given their opinion unanimously for Mr. Hill. Lord Radnor presented a petition at the same time from the principal London booksellers. Lord Ashburton presented one from bankers,

<sup>1</sup> *Hansard*, vol. xl. May, 1857.

solicitors, and men of science, signed by the leading spirits of the metropolis. In reply to the able speeches which accompanied these petitions, the Ministers satisfied themselves by speaking generally and favourably of the subject. They intimated that the matter was under their consideration, and that they intended to deal with it themselves. This they did, according to Miss Martineau, "by proposing little schemes, and alterations, and devices of their own, which only proved that they were courageous in one direction, if not in another."<sup>1</sup> So great and irresistible, however, became the pressure from without that the Ministry left off temporizing, and indicated that they would agree to an inquiry. On the 23d of November, Mr. Spring Rice, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, proposed a Committee to inquire into the present rates or modes of charging postage, with a view to such reduction thereof as may be made *without injury to the revenue*; and for this purpose "to examine especially into the mode recommended of charging and collecting postage in a pamphlet by Mr. Rowland Hill." The Committee consisted of Lords Lowther and Seymour, Sir Thomas Freemantle, Hon. C. P. Villiers, Messrs. Poulett Thomson, Warburton; Raikes Currie, M. J. O'Connell, T. Thorneley, Chalmers, J. Pease, Mahony, Parker, and G. W. Wood. Mr. Wallace, of Kelly, was appointed chairman on the first day, after which the sittings were adjourned till after the Christmas holidays. It was noticed that most of the members nominated by the Chancellor of the Exchequer were favourable to the Government, all but two—Lord Lowther and Sir Thomas Freemantle—having voted for the Ballot. The Tories, however, did not grumble, as on this subject the Government was conservative enough. The Committee sat altogether sixty-three days, concluding their deliberations in August, 1838. They examined all the principal officers of the Post-office, and eighty-three independent witnesses representing all the principal interests of the country. Thus, Dr. Birkbeck, Dr. Lardner, and others, testified to the injury the heavy postage-rates inflicted on literature; Mr. Charles Knight, Mr. Whittaker, Mr. J. W. Parker spoke with more especial reference to the bookselling and publishing trade; Dr. Gregory and Dr. Munk spoke of a cheaper rate of postage

<sup>1</sup> *History of the Thirty Years' Peace*, vol. ii. p. 429.

being a desideratum with the medical profession, especially instancing the case of vaccination; and some of the members of the Mercantile Committee, and others, like Mr. Cobden, represented the different trading and commercial interests involved. The Post-office authorities were particularly urged to send their principal officers, in order that all their known objections should be thoroughly and carefully canvassed. At first many of the members of the Committee showed an evident bias against the scheme, but much of this was removed as the evidence slowly accumulated, and especially when it became clearly apparent that Mr. Hill's facts and statistics were borne out by his evidence, and that this evidence could not be gainsayed by the Post-office. It were a long story to tell how the feeling in favour of the measure grew day by day. Suffice it to say that the final triumph was achieved by dint of great perseverance and activity on the part of Mr. Hill, the favourable witnesses, and the favourable members of the Committee, and by the out-balancing force and incontestable power of Mr. Hill's figures. The examination itself was by no means *ex parte*, but seems to have been carried on with great firmness as well as great ability. Those members of the Committee who were particularly pledged to the protection of the revenue, as well as Lords Lowther and Seymour—who were intimate with Post-office proceedings from having sat on the Commission—appear to have missed no opportunity of sifting the opinions and the statements of each witness; but in spite of all this, and the adverse attitude of nearly all the Post-office officials, Mr. Hill bore up in "that most unpleasant of all positions," as George Stephenson naïvely expressed his own experience of a parliamentary witness-box, with great tact and firmness, fully proving the soundness and the strength of the conclusions of his pamphlet upon which judgment had now to be passed.

A great subject of dispute between Mr. Hill and the Post-office was the increase in the number of letters necessary to the success of the scheme. In opposition to the views of official men,<sup>1</sup> Mr. Hill held that a fivefold increase in the number of

<sup>1</sup> Lord Lichfield thought it would require a twelvefold increase, "and I maintain," said he, "that our calculations are more likely to be right than his."—*Report*, 282.

letters would suffice to preserve the existing gross revenue. As regarded the means of conveyance, he showed that the stage-coaches, &c. already in existence could carry twenty-seven times the number of letters they had ever yet done; and this statement passed without dispute. The evidence was clear and most convincing as to the vast amount of contraband letters daily conveyed; and no less certainly was it shown that if Mr. Hill's schemes were carried out, the temptation to evasion of postage would be at once abolished, inasmuch as there could not then be sufficient inducement for the resorting to illegal mediums. A Glasgow merchant stated that he knew five manufacturers in that city whose correspondence was transmitted illegally in the following proportions, viz.—(1) three to one; (2) eighteen to one; (3) sixteen to one; (4) eight to one; and (5) fifteen to one. Manchester merchants—among whom was Mr. Cobden—stated that they had no doubt that four-fifths of the letters written in that town did not pass through the Post-office. No member of the Committee had any idea of the extent to which the illicit conveyance of letters was carried. A carrier in Scotland was examined, and confessed to having carried sixty letters daily, on the average, for a number of years; knew other carriers who conveyed, on an average, five hundred daily. He assured the Committee that the smuggling was alone done to save the postage. "There might be cases when it was more convenient, or done to save time, but the great object was cheapness." The labouring classes, especially, had no other reason. "They avail themselves of every possible opportunity for getting their letters conveyed cheaply or free." In his opinion, the practice could not be put a stop to until the Post-office authorities followed the example that was set them in putting down illicit distillation in Scotland. "I would reduce the duty, and that would put an end to it, by bringing it down to the expense of conveyance by carriers and others." Mr. John Reid—an extensive bookseller and publisher in Glasgow—sent and received, illicitly, about fifty letters or circulars daily. "I was not caught," he said, "till I had sent twenty thousand letters, &c. otherwise than through the post." He constantly sent his letters by carriers; he also sent and received letters for himself and friends, inclosed in his booksellers' parcels. Any

customer might have his letters so sent, by simply asking the favour. It also came out in evidence, that twelve walking-carriers were engaged exclusively in conveying letters between Birmingham and Walsall and the district, a penny being charged for each letter. The most curious modes of procedure, and the oddest expedients<sup>1</sup> for escaping postage, were exhibited during the sitting of the Committee. One, largely patronized by mercantile houses, consisted in having a number of circulars printed on one large sheet, when, on its arrival at a certain town, a mutual friend or agent would cut it up, and either post or deliver the parts. Nay, matters had been brought to such a state, that a leading journal, commenting on the matter of illicit letter-conveyance just previous to the sittings of the Committee, went the length of saying that, "*fortunately* for trade and commerce, the operation of the Government monopoly is counteracted by the clandestine conveyance of letters." . . . "The means of evasion are so obvious and frequent, and the power of prevention so ineffectual, that the post has become only the *extraordinary*, instead of the usual, channel for the conveyance

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Hill related some of these in his pamphlet. Thus, at page 91, we read:—"Some years ago, when it was the practice to write the name of a Member of Parliament for the purpose of franking a newspaper, a friend of mine, previous to starting on a tour into Scotland, arranged with his family a plan of informing them of his progress and state of health, without putting them to the expense of postage. It was managed thus: he carried with him a number of old newspapers, one of which he put into the post daily. The postmark, with the date, showed his progress; and the state of his health was evinced by the selection of the name, from a list previously agreed upon, with which the newspaper was franked. 'Sir Francis Burdett,' I recollect, denoted vigorous health." Better known is the anecdote of a postal adventure of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, already adverted to at the commencement of the present chapter. The story is told originally, in Mr. Hill's pamphlet also:—"Once, on the poet's visits to the Lake district, he halted at the door of a wayside inn at the moment when the rural postman was delivering a letter to the barmaid of the place. Upon receiving it she turned it over and over in her hand, and then asked the postage of it. The postman demanded a shilling. Sighing deeply, however, the girl handed the letter back, saying she was too poor to pay the required sum. The poet at once offered to pay the postage, and in spite of some resistance on the part of the girl, which he deemed quite natural, did so. The messenger had scarcely left the place, when the young barmaid confessed that she had learnt all she was likely to learn from the letter; that she had only been practising a preconceived trick: she and her brother having agreed that a few hieroglyphics on the back of the letter should tell her all she wanted to know, whilst the letter would contain no writing. "We are so poor," she added, "that we have invented this manner of corresponding and franking our letters."

of letters." Notwithstanding this testimony, the evidence of the Post-office officials on this and the other heads of inquiry betrayed an unusual degree of official jealousy of interference, and a very large amount of official partiality. Thus, Colonel Maberly argued, that if the postage of letters were reduced to a penny it would not stop smuggling: in which case they might as well have smuggling under the one system as the other. But his zeal on this point overcame his discretion. "For," he continued, "1,000 letters might still be sent as a coach-parcel for seven shillings, whereas the Post-office charge for them would be four guineas." But the gallant colonel seems altogether to have forgotten that the item of *delivery* is, after all, the chief item in all Post-office charges. A few more examples of the statements of the authorities may here be given. Thus, the Secretary said, relative to an increase of letters, that "the poor were not disposed to write letters" (10,851). He thought that, during the first year, the letters would not double, even if franking were not abolished (2,949). "If the postage be reduced to one penny, I think the revenue would not recover itself for forty or fifty years." Lord Lichfield said that he had ascertained that each letter then cost "within the smallest fraction of twopence-halfpenny" (2,795). With regard to the principle of the uniform rate, Colonel Maberly thought it might be desirable, but impracticable" (10,939). "Most excellent for foreign postage, but impracticable for inland letters" (3,019). He also said that the public would object to pay *in advance* whatever the rate (10,932-3).

The Committee next had their attention called to still more important facts, viz. that the number of letters conveyed illegally bore no proportion to the number which were not written at all on account of the high rates of postage. On the poor the Post-office charges pressed grievously, and there seemed no other course open to them than that, if their letters could not be received without the payment of exorbitant rates, they must lie in the hands of the authorities. It is only necessary to compare the income of a labouring man with his pressing wants to see that it was idle to suppose that he would apply his little surplus to the enjoyment of post-letters other than in cases of life and death. The Committee were absolutely flooded with instances

in which the Post-office charges seriously interfered with the wants and reasonable enjoyments of the poor. On the general question involved, nearly all the witnesses, of whatever rank or grade, evidenced that the public, to an enormous extent, were deterred from writing letters and sending communications, which otherwise, under a cheaper tariff, they would write and send. That this part of the case was proved may be concluded from the language of the Committee themselves :—"The multitude of transactions which, owing to the high rates of postage, are prevented from being done, or which, if done, are not announced, is quite astonishing. Bills for moderate amounts are not drawn ; small orders for goods are not given or received ; remittances of money are not acknowledged ; the expediting of goods by sea and land, and the sailing or arrival of ships not advised ; printers do not send their proofs ; the country attorney delays writing to his London agent, the commercial traveller to his principal, the town-banker to his agent in the country. In all these, and many other cases, regularity and punctuality is neglected in attempts to save the expenses of exorbitant rates of postage."

On all the other parts of the scheme, and on the scheme itself as a whole, the Committee spoke no less decisively. Generally and briefly, they considered that Mr. Hill's strange and startling facts had been brought out in evidence. They gave their opinion that the rates of postage were so high as materially to interfere with and prejudice trade and commerce ; that the trading and commercial classes had sought, and successfully, illicit means of evading the payment of these heavy charges, and that all classes, for the self-same reason, corresponded free of postage when possible ; that the *rate* of postage exceeded the *cost* of the business in a manifold proportion ; and that, altogether, the existing state of things acted most prejudicially to commerce and to the social habits and moral condition of the people. They conclude, therefore,—

1. That the only remedy is a reduction of the rates, the more frequent despatch of letters, and additional deliveries.

2. That the extension of railways makes these changes urgently necessary.

3. That a *moderate* reduction in the rates would occasion loss,



without diminishing the peculiar evils of the present state of things, or giving rise to much increased correspondence ; and,

4. That the principle of a low, uniform rate is *just in itself*, and when combined with prepayment and collection by stamp, would be exceedingly convenient and highly satisfactory to the public.

So far, their finding, point by point, was in favour of Mr. Hill's scheme. They reported further that, in their *opinion*, the establishment of a penny rate would not, after a temporary depression, result in any ultimate loss to the revenue. As, however, the ~~terms~~ of their appointment precluded them from recommending any plan which involved an immediate loss, they restricted themselves to suggesting a uniform *twopenny* rate.

The Commissioners of Post-office Inquiry—consisting of Lord Seymour, Lord Duncannon, and Mr. Labouchere—who were charged with an “inquiry into the management of the Post-office,” had already concluded their sittings, and had decided upon recommending Mr. Hill's plan as far as it concerned the “twopenny post” department ; that being the only branch then under consideration. “We propose,” say they, and the words are significant, “that the distinction in the rates and districts, which now applies to letters delivered in the twopenny and threepenny post, shall not in any way affect correspondence transmitted under stamped covers ; and that any letter not exceeding half an ounce shall be conveyed free within the metropolis, and the district to which the town and country deliveries extend, *if inclosed in an envelope bearing a penny stamp.*”

With these important recommendations in its favour, the scheme was submitted to Parliament. After some little delay the Government took the matter into its hands, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Baring (who had succeeded Mr. Spring Rice on his being sent to the House of Lords as Lord Monteagle), and the present Sir Francis Thornhill Baring, had the project of a uniform rate of postage embodied in a Bill which passed in the session of 1839. This Act, which was affirmed by a majority of 102 members, conferred temporarily the necessary powers on the Lords of the Treasury. The opposition in the House of Commons was feeble, as many of

the Conservative party did not oppose. Sir Robert Peel's chief argument against the change was that it would necessitate a resort to a direct tax on income—at least this was the only objection avowed. In order, however, to strengthen the hands of Government, now that the question had been narrowed in most men's minds to the single one of revenue, the majority pledged themselves to vote for some *substituted* tax, if, upon experience, any substitute should be needed.<sup>1</sup>

In our attempt to give a continuous account of the proceedings and the result of the Committee's deliberations, we may seem to have neglected to notice much that went on outside the doors of the Committee-room in favour of the measure. At the risk of disturbing the chronology of our account, we must go back over some of the ground for twelve months past. The Mercantile Committee was actively engaged during all the time in spreading information of the progress of the measure, and rousing the public to a due sense of its importance. Not only was the *Post Circular* kept circulating, but hand-bills, fly-sheets, pictorial illustrations, some of which turned the arguments and statements of opponents to ridicule, were distributed in great numbers. Even the dramatic form of representation was resorted to. "A Report of a Scene at Windsor Castle respecting the Uniform Penny Postage," was presented in the form of a short drama. In one part, the scene being laid in the Council Chamber of Windsor Castle, the queen is made to say aloud :—

"Mothers pawning their clothes to pay the postage of a child's letters ! Every subject studying how to evade the postage without caring for the law ! . . . (To Lord Melbourne.) I trust, my Lord, you have commanded the attendance of the Postmaster-General and Mr. Rowland Hill, as I directed, in order that I may hear the reasons of both about this universal penny postage plan, which appears to me likely to remove all these great evils."

After Rowland Hill has detailed his plan, and Lord Lichfield has abused it, and Lord Melbourne has confessed his ignorance of both sides of the question, the queen takes the reformer's side very warmly, seeming to understand the minutest details. After much amusing matter, wherein the arguments for reform are well touched up, the Postmaster-General says that he feels

<sup>1</sup> *Hansard*, vol. xlix. 1839.

uneasy, and wishes to be relieved from the audience. After he has retired, the queen sums up as follows :—

“What I have read, and this interview, have convinced me that a uniform penny post is most advisable. I am sure it would confer a great boon on the poorer classes of my subjects, and would be the greatest benefit to religion, to morals, to general knowledge, and to trade.” After commanding Lord Melbourne to attend to it, she concludes : “Mr. Hill, the nation will owe you a large debt of gratitude, which I am sure it will not be unwilling to repay.”

A cheap edition of this *jeu d'esprit* was published by the London Committee, and circulated by thousands. It was so plain and pungent, and the form given to it proved so attractive, that it brought the question home to the masses of the nation in a remarkable manner. This cheap edition finished as follows :—

“Mothers and fathers that wish to hear from their absent children ;

“Friends who are parted that wish to write to each other ;

“Farmers that wish to hear of the best market ;

“Tradesmen that wish to receive money quickly and cheaply ;

“Mechanics and labourers that wish to learn where good work and high wages are to be had ;

“Support your queen and the report of the House of Commons with your petitions for a uniform penny post.”

Nor were there wanting other helpers who did good service in a more staid way for the movement. Mr. W. H. Ashurst, in an able pamphlet,<sup>1</sup> went over the entire ground up to that time, strongly advocating a thorough trial of the scheme. Lord Brougham, in the House of Lords, urgently hoped that the opposition of the Post-office authorities might not be allowed to have any unfair weight with their Lordships or the country. He told how the Post-office authorities had before resisted reasonable reform. In a most amusing speech he told how Mr. Palmer had been laughed at “by the oldest and ablest officers of the Post-office” at the time he proposed his great improvements ; yet how, “notwithstanding the ‘absolute contempt,’ the ‘scornful indignation’ to which he was subjected, when Palmer laid his reckless hand on the pace of the Post-office horses, the revenue was 150,000*l.* though it had since fallen to 1,150,000*l.*” He begged their Lordships’ pardons for giving them such speci-

<sup>1</sup> *Facts and Reasons in support of Mr. R. Hill's plan for a Universal Penny Postage.* Hooper, 1838.

mens of the wisdom of their ancestors, but they were useful in elucidating the kind of objections people would bring to any kind of innovations. He would hold them out as a warning in the present case.

No one out of Parliament, at any rate, who read Mr. Hill's pamphlet attentively, or who studied the various phases through which the agitation carried the measure, but was convinced of its practicability ; and a careful perusal of the evidence collected by the Committee of the House of Commons was sufficient to determine any waverer as to the necessity of its being adopted. Still there were serious misgivings as to the steps which the Melbourne administration must soon announce. It was generally believed that the measure would be brought in shorn of some of its most important clauses ; few thought it possible that it would be fully tried. Petitions were presented to Parliament praying that the plan should be tried as a whole, and that there should be no change except one based on the main principles of Mr. Hill's scheme. Lord Radnor spoke the general belief when he expressed his fear that the Government were only about to try "as much of that scheme as would ensure its failure." There were some few objections to Mr. Hill's plan, and some difficulties about it ; but the nation at large had decided for it, and some of the principal men in the country, not favourable to the then existing Ministry, decided for it also. The Duke of Wellington was "disposed to admit, that that which was called Mr. R. Hill's plan was, if it was adopted as it was proposed, of all the plans that which was most likely to be successful."<sup>1</sup> The Duke of Richmond, waiving all objections, pressed upon the Ministers, that if they gave their sanction to any uniform plan, it should be to Mr. Hill's, "for that alone, and not the twopenny postage, seems to me to give hope of ultimate success."<sup>2</sup>

On the 12th of November, 1839, the Lords of the Treasury set many doubts at rest by issuing a minute, under the authority of the Act before referred to, reducing the postage of all inland letters to the uniform rate of *fourpence*. This arrangement, which is said to have been made with the full concurrence of Mr. Hill, was resorted to as a means of accustoming the officers to the uniform rate and system of charging by weight ; but this

<sup>1</sup> *Select Committee on Postage*, 1843.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*.

fact cannot sufficiently have been made known to the country, inasmuch as great and general dissatisfaction was expressed with it, and we find it openly avowed in many respectable organs of public opinion at that time, that the Government meant to establish permanently a fourpenny rate of postage. The reformer, however, has placed the question beyond doubt by stating that this arrangement was only temporary and suggested by him for the purpose above-stated. On the 10th of January, another minute was issued, ordering the adoption of a uniform penny rate. On the 10th of August, the Treasury had its minute confirmed by the Statute 3 and 4 Vict. chap. 96.

The result of the agitation of only two years was hailed with intense satisfaction by the great bulk of the British population, and it happily forms a pleasant page in our national history. The reform then inaugurated has since spread with such amazing rapidity, that its growth and progress may be said to belong not solely to English history, but to the history of civilization itself. The entire race is now ready to attest the benefit and blessing bestowed upon it by the measure of 1840. From that time to this the feeling of gratitude has shown itself in different ways. One early expression of this feeling may well find a place here. Just after the Act was passed, the late Hartley Coleridge being in the company of a literary gentleman, turned the conversation on Mr. Hill and his scheme. On the spur of the moment the young poet said he thought he could write something about it, and on being supplied with the necessary materials, threw off the following sonnet which is not at all known :—

“ They say that spirits can by thought impart  
 Whate’er they know, and are, or wish to be ;  
 But man, dependent on the ministry  
 Of his own brain, has authorized an art  
 To memorize the meanings of his heart.  
 The love we cannot hear, we yet may see,  
 May spell the words—the strange orthography—  
 That might make Lindley or old Dilworth start :  
 Taxes, we know, are very wicked things—  
 They search our pockets and retrench our pleasures—  
 But ’tis the best of Ministerial measures  
 That imps the feathers of young Cupid’s wings,  
 Father and mother, sister, brother, son,  
 Husband and wife, pronounce one benison.”

The most important organs of public opinion were loud in their praises of the Government measure, and of the men who had taken the most prominent part in the agitation. There were some exceptions, as a matter of course, and there were not wanting predictions as to the certain failure of the new plans. It is now very amusing and instructive to turn to some of the unfavourable expressions of opinion elicited by the passing of the Act. True to its traditional policy, the *Quarterly Review* fulminated and denounced, but only to find before much time had elapsed that its sage, prophetic averments were falsified by subsequent events. Mr. John Wilson Croker, in the *Quarterly*, tried hard to extinguish the reformer, but Mr. Hill was made of stuff too stern for him. In October, 1839, this writer stigmatized the measure as "one of the most inconsiderate jumps in the dark ever made by that very inconsiderate assembly." It "is distinguished by weakness and rashness;" it "is neither necessary nor wise." But the judgment of posterity is in this, as in so many other things Croker attempted, sadly against the reviewer. The *Quarterly Review*, though the most virulent, was certainly not the only organ that abused the penny postage scheme. Other important serials deprecated parts of the measure, as, for instance, prepayment of letters. Some writers looked askance at the scheme. Few writers of any note publicly expressed complete disagreement with the new plans. Raikes, in his *Diary*, with that perverted vision which only sees the little evils of any great social improvement, wrote:—"The Chancellor of the Exchequer in bringing forward his Budget, has proposed that the postage on a single letter should be reduced to one penny. This will increase the number of idle scribblers; be of little benefit to the lower classes, who seldom have occasion to write; and is likely only to advantage the commercial houses and bankers, who can well afford to pay the postage." The late Mr. McCullagh was led from some consideration or other in one of his works published at the period<sup>1</sup> to speak of "the miserable quackery of a uniform penny postage rate," although he was one of the first to sign the petition from the men of science and men of letters in favour of the measure! But "hereby hangs a tale," which we might have told, but *de mortuis nil, nisi bonum*.

<sup>1</sup> *Commercial Dictionary*, p. 990.

The Whigs seem to have treated Mr. Hill with justice and fairness after the measure to which they had yielded had passed. A Treasury appointment was given to him to enable him to work out his plans, or, in the wording of the engagement, "to assist in carrying into effect the penny postage." This appointment resulted in varying success until the Tory party came into power in 1841. After this, things went worse with him; Mr. Goulbourn, the new Chancellor of the Exchequer, was politely unfriendly; and the result was, that in the summer of 1842, after about three years of this superintending service, he was politely bowed out of the Treasury on the plea that his work was finished; that his nursling had found its legs, and might now be taken into the peculiar care of the Post-office authorities themselves. Thus again was the progress of Post-office improvements interrupted by leaving them in the hands of unwilling authorities—"prophets," as one writer has said in reference to this very case, "who had the direct means of assisting in the fulfilment of their own predictions." Mr. Hill entreated the new Premier to let him remain, or in some way to exercise a supervision over his system, at any pecuniary sacrifice to himself, but his entreaties were unavailing. He must watch his scheme from a distance.<sup>1</sup>

Speaking of the hindrance which Mr. Hill met with in official circles, we are reminded of a pamphlet which appeared shortly after this period, during Mr. Hill's exile, evidently from some Post-office official, *On the Administration of the Post-office*.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Lord Lowther," so Mr. Hill was told, "was a steady friend to post reform, and was well acquainted with the department." Without doubt the new Postmaster-General's feelings, however ridiculous, were consulted in this matter. Mr. Hill's anxiety for the general scheme, and for subsequent minor proposals, was quite natural. When refused the Treasury appointment, he asked to be taken into the Post-office, there to see his plans worked out. Lord Lowther, when he comes to speak on the proposal, somewhat indignantly asks the Treasury Lords if "the character and fortunes of the thousands employed in the Post-Office are to be placed at the mercy of an *individual* who confesses that he is 'not very familiar with the details of the methods now practised.'" "It is easy to imagine," continued Lord Lowther, "the damage the community might sustain from *his tampering* with a vast machine interwoven with all the details of Government, and necessary to the daily habits and events of this great empire!" The matter is not one of "detail," but of "principle;" if their Lordship's want this or that carried into execution, they have only to say so, and Lord Lowther will see that it is done, "though it may be in opposition to my own opinion."

<sup>2</sup> Hatchard and Son. 1844.

This precious pamphlet has been long consigned to well-merited oblivion, and we only rescue it for a moment from the limbo of all worthless things to show the feeling which then actuated some of those in office. The reader can scarcely fail to be reminded of the criticism which Mr. Palmer's scheme called forth from the leading spirits of the Post-office of his day. The pamphlet, illogical where it is not abusive, laid it down as a principle that "the Post-office is not under any *obligation* to convey the correspondence of the country." Again, that "the Post-office is a Government monopoly for the benefit of the public revenue, and exists for the *sole* purpose of profit." Then there are praises for the old, and abuses for the new *régime*. "The celerity, the certainty, the security with which so vast a machine executed such an infinite complexity of details were truly admirable!" On the other hand, "whilst mesmerism and the other attractive novelties of the day have had their hour, the *quackery of penny postage* ought surely now to follow the same course." Mr. Hill comes in for a good share of detraction. His figures are "garbled extracts;" some of his statements "beneath criticism;" whilst his complaints are judged "mortified vanities!" He is further "kindly counselled" to leave "his pet scheme to the practical men of the Post-office." In the following flowery language he is recommended to "behold it (his project) as a spectator from the shore, viewing his little bark in safety, navigated by those who are practically best acquainted with the chart, wind, and waves."

Mr. Hill's popularity outside the Post-office contrasted favourably with the estimation in which he was held inside. The entire community had become impressed with the value of his measures, and the important services he had rendered. Spurred on to exertions by the treatment he had received at the hands of an Administration, which, to use the fine expression of Lord Halifax in reference to another public benefactor, "refused to supply the oil for a lamp which gave so much light," a public subscription was opened throughout the country, which, joined in by all classes, was quickly represented by a handsome sum. The money, which amounted to over thirteen thousand pounds, and which was only considered an expression of national gratitude, and by no means a full requital for his services, was



presented to him at a public banquet got up in London under the auspices of the "Mercantile Committee." In an address which accompanied the testimonial, Mr. Hill's measure of reform was pronounced one "which had opened the blessings of a free correspondence to the teacher of religion, the man of science and literature, the merchant and trader, and the whole British nation—especially the poorest and most defenceless portions of it—a measure which is the greatest boon conferred in modern times on all the social interests of the civilized world." Mr. Hill's bearing on the occasion in question is described as most modest and unassuming. He expressed his gratitude for the national testimonial in few but telling phrases. He delicately alluded to his proscription from office, regretting that he could not watch the progress of his measure narrowly, and pointed out improvements which were still necessary to give complete efficiency to his reform. Mr. Hill gave ample credit to those who had sustained him in his efforts to carry his plans through Parliament, and especially named Messrs. Wallace and Warburton, members of the Special Committee of 1838, Mr. Baring, the ex-Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Lords Ashburton and Brougham.

We shall have frequent occasion, as we advance, to mention Mr. Hill's name in connexion with Post-office history during the past twenty years; but we may here notice the remaining particulars of Mr. Hill's *personal* history. On the restoration of the Whigs to power in 1846, Mr. Hill was brought back into office, or rather first placed in office at St. Martin's-le-Grand, as secretary to the Postmaster-General, the present Marquis of Clanricarde. In 1854, on Colonel Maberly's removal to the Audit Office, Mr. Hill attained the deserved honour of Secretary to the Post-office, under the late Lord Canning—the highest fixed appointment in the department, and second only in responsibility to that of Postmaster-General. In 1860 Mr. Hill was further honoured with the approval of his sovereign, and few will question it, if we say it was a worthy exercise of the royal prerogative, when he was called to receive the dignity of Knight Commander of the Bath.

The arduous exertions, extending over a quarter of a century, and the increasing duties of the Secretary of the Post-office

have, within the last few years, begun to tell upon the physical system of Sir Rowland Hill, and have more than once caused him to absent himself from the post which he has made so honourable and responsible. During the autumn of 1863 he obtained leave of absence from active duty for six months—his place being filled by Mr. Tilley, the senior assistant secretary of the Post-office—a step which was generally understood to be preparatory to his resignation, should no improvement be manifest in his health. His retirement was announced during March, 1864, when he left the Post-office, and passed “not into obscurity, but into deserved repose.” May he be long spared to enjoy the rest and quiet which he has so well earned, and the gratitude and sympathy which must be universally felt for him. His early work, that would have been Herculean, even if it had not been assailed by foes without and foes within, must have caused him immense labour of hand and labour of brain; the carrying out also of many important subsequent measures, which may be said to have followed as necessary corollaries of his great reform, must have occasioned him an amount of bodily and mental toil and excitement of which the “roll of common men” have neither experience nor conception. Not to speak of his services to commerce, Sir Rowland Hill, more than any living individual, has succeeded in drawing close the domestic ties of the nation, and extending in all and in every way the best interests of social life. Mr. Ashurst, in 1838, wrote in his pamphlet, to which we have referred previously, “Mr. Hill has rendered immense service to the public, and will ultimately be considered as the benefactor of his country.” To a great extent this prediction has already been verified, although opinions may very probably differ as to the form and extent which the public gratitude has taken up to this time.

The Executive Government, in a Treasury minute, dated March 11th, 1864, in just and highly appreciative language—unusually complimentary for that class of official documents—signified its resolution to grant Sir Rowland Hill his full salary as a retiring allowance. After recounting his valuable services, and stating that his case was a fitting one for special arrangement, it thus proceeds:—“Under the circumstances, it may justly be averred that my Lords are dealing on the present

occasion with the case not merely of a meritorious public servant, but of a benefactor of his race ; and that his fitting reward is to be found not in this or that amount of pension, but in the grateful recollection of his country. But my Lords discharge the portion of duty which belongs to them with cordial satisfaction, in according to Sir Rowland Hill for life his full salary of 2,000*l.* per annum." Many of the organs of public opinion, and several members of the Legislature thought, however, that "the grateful recollection of his country," though an object the attainment of which would ever be one of the highest ambition, was scarcely substantial enough, especially when it was considered that Sir Rowland Hill's career had been very chequered, and that in pursuance of his favourite project, he had sacrificed prospects which would, in all human probability, have raised him to greater affluence. When therefore Lord Palmerston gave notice of moving that the pension should be continued to Lady Hill, in the event of her surviving her husband, as another instalment of what was due to him, the Premier was urged by an influential deputation to take into consideration the desirability of making a Parliamentary grant of a certain sum of money in place of this deferred pension. Accordingly, in May, 1864, Lord Palmerston brought down to the House a message from the Queen, proposing a grant of 20,000*l.* The veteran Premier, in proposing this "honorarium"—which the vast majority of Englishmen would like to have seen doubled—spoke in eloquent terms in praise of Sir Rowland Hill's invention ; its simplicity ; the amazing stimulus it had given to the commerce and industry of the nation ; and its inestimable value in the cultivation of the domestic affections, especially among the humbler classes. One voice alone was raised against the modest grant—that of the arch economist, the ubiquitous Mr. Williams. The representatives of the important constituencies of the city of London, Liverpool, Manchester, and Leeds, instantly repudiated this parsimony. Sir Francis Baring bore his valuable testimony to the good humour, calm sense, and intelligence with which Sir Rowland Hill encountered the difficulties raised against his plan ; while Mr. Neate, the member for Oxford (who was private secretary to Sir Francis Baring, when the latter was Chancellor of the Exchequer), very justly reminded the House of the atten-

tion, the time, and the labour which Sir Francis himself had bestowed upon the measure.

It only remains to add that the inhabitants of Birmingham and Liverpool have cordially recognised, in different ways, Sir Rowland Hill's services; that since his retirement, the Society of Arts has presented him with the first gold "Albert medal," recently established in memory of the late President, the Prince Consort, to be given "for distinguished merit in promoting arts, manufactures, or commerce;" and that the University of Oxford has conferred upon him the honorary degree of Doctor of Common Law. It is pleasant to read, in connexion with the last honour, how even the wayward and boisterous undergraduates forsook their frolics for one moment, to receive with becoming warmth the man who had helped them so largely to increase their social enjoyments.

One thing we take leave to think Sir Rowland Hill might have been spared on his retirement,<sup>1</sup> and we cannot conclude this chapter without alluding to it. We refer to the endeavour made in one or two influential quarters to partition the honour of suggesting the uniform plan of penny postage between the late Secretary and some others, who, with the exception of Mr. Wallace, of Kelly, have never been definitely named. Now, we maintain that if a clear and practicable way be not shown to the realization of a plan for any comprehensive change, the mere

<sup>1</sup> Another little matter which ought not to be passed over unnoticed was the attitude of the leaders of the Conservative party. We say *leaders*, because the great body of Conservatives are no less grateful than others for a blessing which all share alike. Nor is it possible that either leaders or followers can wish for a return to the old order of things. During the discussions relating to Sir Rowland Hill, but one Conservative member raised his voice in the otherwise general acclaim. We are led to notice this not on Sir R. Hill's behalf alone, but in the *general interest* of civil servants, who like him deserve well of their country, whose claims must come from time to time before the Legislature, and whose merits must now more than ever meet with their proper and unstinted reward. That the services of disfranchised official men should be viewed through a party medium is unfair to them. Apart from any political bias—for we are required to eschew politics—we think it is too evident that the recollection of the foils and counterfoils of 1838, 1839, and 1842—1843, had much to do with this apathy and coldness. Afterwards, one of the leading opposition organs, taking its cue from the *vis inertiae* in high places, must need speak of Sir R. Hill as "one of the most favoured of public servants," "few men have had such a prosperous career"! and more *ad nauseam*. On the whole, while his merits and claims have been promptly and cordially, if not fully, recognised by the one great section of the community, it is well that he has not been left to the tender mercies of the other.

suggestion of the idea amounts to little. As a matter of fact, however, there is absolutely no evidence forthcoming of any one having as much as *offered the theory* of a uniform low rate of postage and payment by weight, before the publication of the pamphlet on *Post Reform*; and really no one will pretend to dispute that the great merit of carrying out the penny post measure belongs to Sir Rowland Hill. Of course that measure could not have so succeeded without the assistance of others, and we are not left in doubt as to how much of the success is owing to the cordial co-operation, since 1845, of the principal officers of the Post-office. In the paper published on his retirement, Sir R. Hill speaks of their services in language which conveys the highest compliment—"Men whose ability would do credit to any service, and whose zeal could not be greater if their object were private instead of public benefit." This language Lord Stanley of Alderley almost repeats in the *Tenth Report* on the Post-office, just published; when, in speaking with regret of the great loss the public has sustained in the retirement of Sir Rowland Hill, and bearing evidence to the zeal and ability which he displayed in the office of Secretary (page 40), he also referred to the many able men at the Post-office, who have laboured long and diligently in the service, and "who, for the most part, could have but little hope of making themselves known beyond the department."

## CHAPTER XI.

### EARLY RESULTS OF THE PENNY-POSTAGE SCHEME.

THERE are two aspects in which to contemplate the measure of penny-post reform. The first relates to its social, moral, and commercial results ; the second views it in its financial relationship. When the system had been in operation two years, it was found that the success of the scheme in its first aspect had far surpassed the most sanguine expectations ever formed of it by any of its advocates. As a financial measure, it cannot be said to have succeeded originally. In this latter respect it disappointed even Mr. Hill, who, though he never mentioned the date when the revenue derivable from the Post-office would be recovered under the new system, was very emphatic in his assurances that the loss during the first year would not exceed 300,000*l*. Calculating upon a fourfold increase of letters, in his pamphlet<sup>1</sup> he estimated the net revenue, after deducting for franks and newspapers, in round numbers at 1,300,000*l*. ; a sum only 300,000*l*. less than the revenue of 1837. We do not say that Mr. Hill originally calculated on recovering the absolute *net* revenue by the collection of postage ; but any deficiency which might continue, after the scheme was fairly tried, he expected to see supplied, eventually, by increased productiveness in other departments of the revenue, which would be benefited by the stimulus given to commerce by improved communication.<sup>2</sup> Before the Parliamentary Committee he was equally explicit :<sup>3</sup> when asked if, on a fivefold increase, there would still be a deficiency on the net revenue, he answered in the affirmative, to the extent of, he should think, 300,000*l*. He again, however, stated his conviction that the deficit would be

<sup>1</sup> *Post-office Reform*, p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> *Results of the New Postal Arrangements*, read before the Statistical Society of London, 1841.

<sup>3</sup> *Second Report*, p. 365.

made up by the general improvement of trade and commerce in the country. It is true that events proved that the falling-off in the *gross* revenue was considerably in excess of all the calculations which had been made: but even under this head, much may be said; and in considering the different results of penny postage, we expect to be able to point out that the scheme had intrinsic qualities in it, which, under proper treatment, must have made it in all respects a success. Mr. Hill met another Parliamentary Committee in 1843, when his recommendations—in their principal features, at any rate—had been acted upon for three years. In the course of this further investigation—to the circumstances attending which we shall presently allude—much information relative to the carrying out of the measure, its successes, and failures, was elicited.

It was shown beyond all dispute, that the scheme had almost entirely prevented breaches of the law, and that if any illicit correspondence was carried on, it was simply and purely in matters where the question of speed was involved; that the evils, amounting to social prohibitions, so prevalent before the change, had been, for the most part, removed. Commercial transactions, relating even to very small amounts, were now managed through the post. Small orders were constantly transmitted; the business of the Money-order office having increased almost *twenty-fold*—first, from the reduction of postage in 1840, and then from the reduction of the fees in November of the same year. “These orders are generally acknowledged. Printers send their proofs without hesitation;<sup>1</sup> the commercial traveller writes regularly to his principal, and is enabled for the first time to advise his customers of his approach; private individuals and public institutions distribute widely their circulars and their accounts of proceedings to every part of the land.” Better than any account that we might give of the reception of this boon by the country, and the social and commercial advantages which were

<sup>1</sup> The reader of such books as Cowper's *Life and Letters*, and Moore's *Correspondence*, will find that the means of obtaining franks, or carriage for their manuscripts or proofs, gave the poets frequent uneasiness, and lost them much time. So with many needy literary men, in what Professor de Morgan somewhat absurdly calls the “Prerowlandian days.” The Professor himself gives an instance of an author sending up some dry manuscripts to him, under cover to a member of Parliament, expressing a hope, we think, that the representative would feel some interest in the subject.

immediately seen to follow from it, we may here give some account of the correspondence which flowed in upon Mr. Hill between 1840—1842, and which he read to the Select Committee appointed to try the merits of his scheme. Ten times the weight of evidence, and far more striking instances of the advantages of the penny-post scheme might *now* be adduced ; but it must be remembered that we are here speaking merely of first results, and when the scheme had been but three years in operation. Numbers of tradesmen wrote to say how their business had increased within the three years. One large merchant now sent the whole of his invoices by post ; another increased the number of his “prices current” by 10,000 per annum. Messrs. Pickford and Co. the carriers, despatched by post *eight* times the number of letters posted in 1839 ; whilst the letters, had they been liable to be charged as per single sheet, would have numbered 720,000 in 1842 from this one firm, against 30,000 letters in 1839. In this case we have an exemplification of the correctness of the argument upon which Mr. Hill built his scheme ; for the increase of money actually paid for postage was at the rate of 33 per cent. Mr. Charles Knight, the London publisher, said the penny-postage stimulated every branch of his trade, and brought the country booksellers into almost daily communication with the London houses. Mr. Bagster, the publisher of a Polyglot Bible in twenty-four languages, stated to Mr. Hill that the revision which he was just giving to his work as it was passing through the press would, on the old system, have cost him 1,500*l.* in postage alone, and that the Bible could not have been printed but for the penny post. Secretaries of different benevolent and literary societies wrote to say how their machinery had been improved ; conductors of educational establishments, how people were everywhere learning to write for the first time in order to enjoy the benefits of a free correspondence, and how night-classes for teaching writing to adults were springing up in all large towns for the same object. Mr. Stokes, the honorary secretary of the Parker Society—composed of the principal Church dignitaries and some intelligent laymen—which has done so much for ecclesiastical literature by reprinting the works of the early English reformers, stated that the Society could never have come into existence but for the penny postage.



One of the principal advocates for the repeal of the Corn Laws subsequently gave it as his opinion, that their objects were achieved *two years earlier* than otherwise would have been the case, owing to the introduction of cheap postage. After a lapse of twenty years, many more useful societies might be mentioned of which the same could be said. An interesting letter from the late Professor Henslow, the then Rector of Hitcham in Suffolk, may be given, as it contains a pretty accurate estimate of the social advantages accruing to the masses. The professor had, consequent upon the change at the Post-office, arranged a scheme of co-operation for advancing among the landed interest of the county the progress of agricultural science. After stating that the mere suggestion of such a thing had involved him in a correspondence which he could not have sustained if it had not been for the penny postage, he goes on to say: "To the importance of the penny postage to those who cultivate science, I can bear most unequivocal testimony, as I am continually receiving and transmitting a variety of specimens by post. Among them, you will laugh to hear that I have received three living carnivorous slugs, which arrived safely in a pill-box! That the penny postage is an important addition to the comforts of the poor labourer, I can also testify. From my residence in a neighbourhood where scarcely any labourers can read, much less write, I am often employed by them as an amanuensis, and have frequently heard them express their satisfaction at the facility they enjoy of now corresponding with distant relatives. The rising generation are learning to write, and a most material addition to the circulation of letters may soon be expected. Of the vast domestic comfort which the penny postage has added to homes like my own, I need say nothing more." Miss Harriet Martineau bore testimony to the social advantages of the measure in the neighbourhood where she resided. A celebrated writer of the period gives it as his opinion, that "the penny-post scheme was a much wiser and more effective measure than the Prussian system of education" just then established. "By the reduction of the postage on letters," adds he,<sup>1</sup> "the use and advantage of education has been brought home to the common man (for it no longer costs him a

<sup>1</sup> Laing's *Notes of a Traveller*.

day's pay to communicate with his family). A State machinery of schoolmasters on the Prussian system would cost far more than the sacrifice of revenue by the reduction of postage. This measure will be the great historical distinction of the reign of Victoria. Every mother in the kingdom who has children earning their bread at a distance, lays her head on the pillow at night with a feeling of gratitude for this blessing." Almost all now living, who shared the benefits of the scheme at this early date, could probably relate some anecdote which circumstances had brought to their knowledge as to the operation of penny postage *on the poorer classes especially*. Thus, the then Inspector of Prisons for Scotland, visiting the Shetland Islands in 1842, writes:<sup>1</sup> "The Zetlanders are delighted with cheap postage. The postmaster told me that the increase in the number of letters is astonishing. . . . Another gentleman who is well acquainted with the people told me, that although the desire of parents to keep their offspring at home is unusually strong in Zetland, yet that cheap postage has had the effect of reconciling families to the temporary absence of their members, and has thus opened to the islanders the labour-market of the mainland." An American writer,<sup>2</sup> in an admirable pamphlet on cheap postage, says: "The people of England expend now as much money as they did under the old system; but the advantage is, they get more service for their money, and it gives a spring to business, trade, science, literature, philanthropy, social affection, and all plans of public utility." Joseph Hume, writing to Mr. Bancroft, then American minister at the Court of St. James's, 1848, says: "I am not aware of any reform, amongst the many which I have promoted during the past forty years, that has had, and will have, better results towards the improvement of the country socially, morally, and politically." And Mr. Hill himself, in addressing the Statistical Society in May, 1841,<sup>3</sup> made a statement which was neither an idle nor a vain boast, when he assured them that "the postman has now to make long rounds through humble districts, where, heretofore, his knock was rarely heard."

We have yet the second, or financial aspect of the measure to

<sup>1</sup> *Fraser's Magazine*, September, 1862.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Joshua Leavitt.

<sup>3</sup> Page 96.

consider. In two years a tolerably correct idea might be formed as to the results of the scheme financially; but it would certainly not be fair to attempt any full estimate of such a thorough reform within a more circumscribed period. Not that this was not attempted. Colonel Maberly discovered, at the end of the *first week*, that Mr. Hill's plan had failed, at any rate, as a question of revenue. No doubt the wish was father to the thought. He not only thought so, however, but proceeded to take timely action and shield himself and his congeners against some probable future attack. In his own words, he charged "the officials to take care that no obstacle was thrown in the way of the scheme, so as to give a colour to the allegation"—which the prophetic colonel was only too sure would be made—"that its failure was owing to the unwillingness of the authorities to carry it fairly into execution."<sup>1</sup>

In the first year of penny postage, notwithstanding all the confident prophecies to the contrary from those who might have been supposed to have had means of judging, the net proceeds of the Post-office were between four and five hundred thousand pounds, whilst the number of letters actually sent was more than doubled. Against a million and a half yearly revenue of the previous year, there certainly appeared an enormous deficit; but till all other arguments were exhausted, it ought not to have been considered either evidence or proof of the failure of cheap postage. In the first instance, the Post-office authorities said the scheme would not pay its expenses: a year sufficed to prove their mistake. It was then said that the revenue sacrificed would never be recovered, and accidental circumstances, of which we shall presently speak, favoured for a time this view: the argument, however, was based on erroneous views, as subsequent events have sufficiently shown. Bad as things appeared, there were, nevertheless, many significant signs, at the end of three years, that the *gross* revenue under the old would soon be reached under the new system, and even prospects that the *past net* revenue might still be recoverable. Both these anticipations have now been entirely realized. With a tenfold—nay, in many cases, a hundredfold—gain to different classes of the community—with the Post-office supplying more situations by thousands

<sup>1</sup> Select Committee on Postage, 1843, p. 246.

than under the *ancien régime*, the old gross revenue was passed in 1850-1, and the net revenue was reached in 1863. Moreover, every complaint under this head has long since been silenced. Many considerations went to hinder the early growth of the revenue; and it is to some of these considerations that we must now turn for a moment.

It is of primary importance that the reader should remember that Mr. Hill, in his pamphlet and elsewhere, expressed a decided opinion that the maintenance of the Post-office revenue depended upon the carrying out of *all his plans*.<sup>1</sup> In a speech which he delivered at Wolverhampton, September 7th, 1839, he said: "The mere reduction in the rates of postage will, of course, greatly increase the number of letters; but much will still depend on the extent to which the facilities for despatching letters are improved by a careful employment of the many economical and speedy modes of conveyance which now exist, and by a solicitous attention to all the minute ramifications of distribution. If, on the one hand, due attention is paid to the increasing demands of the public for the more frequent and more speedy despatch of letters, and, on the other hand, pains are taken to keep down the cost of management, though some temporary loss of revenue will arise, I see no reason to fear that the loss will be either great or permanent." Mr. Hill's proposals, it will be remembered, were embraced under four principal heads. The first, a uniform and low rate of postage, was fully carried out; but it was the only part of the measure which was realized at this time. The second, increased speed in the delivery of letters; and the third, consisting of provisions for greater facility in the despatch of letters, were not attempted, or, if attempted, only in the slightest degree. With regard to the simplifications of the operations of the Post-office, which formed the fourth great item, little or nothing was done, though that little was rendered easy of accomplishment by the uniformity of postage-rates. Not only was the scheme not fairly worked, and the improvements only partially carried out, but they were crippled in their operation by officials who, if not hostile, were half-hearted and far from anxious for a successful issue. The natural difficulties in the way of the measure were numerous

<sup>1</sup> Parliamentary Committee, *Third Report*, p. 64.

enough without the addition of official opposition. Trade was flourishing when the Postage Bill was carried ; it was fearfully depressed in the first year of penny postage. It is well, as Miss Martineau points out, that none foreknew the heavy reverse which was at hand, and the long and painful depression that ensued after the passing of the Act, for none might then have had the courage to go into the enterprise.

This circumstance, accounting, as it does, for some of the deficit in the first and second years, also served to test the real principles of the reform.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Hill's plan, though given over to the apathy and *vis inertiae* of the authorities—to "the unwilling horses of the Post-office," as Mr. Baring subsequently designated them—really worked well, though at a loss, when everything else was working ill. Moreover, the tendency of cheap communication to improve the general revenue of the country was clearly apparent so early as 1842 ; and this is a fact which ought not to be lost sight of for a moment. The reduction of postage-rates was to the community a reduction of taxation ; the capital released was driven into other and perhaps more legitimate channels. The Exchequer lost revenue from one source, but it gained it in other ways, as a consequence on the outlay at the Post-office. In 1842, there was an acknowledged loss to the Post-office revenue of 900,000*l*. In the same year, no serious deficiency appeared in the general accounts of the country, notwithstanding the extent of the depression in trade.

There were special as well as general considerations entering into the question of the acknowledged deficiency in this revenue. It is clear that Mr. Hill—who did not foresee that so much money would be sacrificed, and who was sanguine of recovering it at no distant date—likewise could have had but an indefinite idea of the vast amount of extra machinery that would be called into operation by the full development of his plans ; the extent of the measures that must follow if the country was to be equally privileged with cheap correspondence ; and the concessions that would have to be granted when the wedge was driven in by this, his principle measure. As only one of the causes

<sup>1</sup> "The first result of the scheme amply vindicated the policy of the new system, but it required progressive and striking evidence to exhaust all opposition."—*Ency. Brit.* Eighth Edition.

leading to the extra heavy expenses of the Post-office department, we may mention the changes in the system of mail conveyance consequent on the introduction of railways. During the year 1838, railways had absorbed a large amount of stage-coach traffic. Mr. Hill, when making his original proposals, calculated that the number of chargeable letters might be increased twenty-four fold without overloading the mails, and without any *material addition to the sums paid to contractors*. So great and important—we would almost say vital—was the question of *speed* to the Post-office, that railways were brought into requisition, although the cost of the carriage of the mails was, at the outset, doubled, tripled, and even quadrupled. But this was not all. Not only did the railways charge more than the coaches, but the charges of the coaches actually increased also. The opening of the railways, by diminishing in great measure the competition which had existed on parallel lines of road, led to an augmentation of the rates in some instances to double the usual cost. Many striking examples of the great difference in the cost of the two services might be given. For instance,<sup>1</sup> so late as 1844, a coach proprietor in the North of England actually paid to the Post-office department the sum of two hundred pounds annually for what he regarded as the privilege of conveying the mails, twice a day, between Lancaster and Carlisle. Now the Post-office *pays* the Lancaster and Carlisle Railway upwards of 18,000*l.* annually for the same service.<sup>2</sup> The items of charges for mail conveyance by railway at the present time and for several years past—if they could have been known by any means, or even guessed at, by the enterprising post-reformer of 1837—might have had the effect of

<sup>1</sup> Postmaster General's *First Report*.

<sup>2</sup> Bearing in mind these facts, the reader will know what amount of value to put upon such statements as the following. Surely Sir Morton Peto cannot have investigated this subject very closely. "The Post-office," says this amateur financier, "found that the railways afforded the means of carrying letters at immensely increased speed, and in immensely increased quantities," and so far there is no dispute about it. "They find also, that, *pro rata*, the cost of conveyance was diminished: for whilst one railway train can convey as many bags of letters as at least 50 of the old mail coaches (why not have said 5,000 instead of 50? the railway train could do the one as easily as the other, but is never required to do either), the payment to a railway company for a train is *very little in excess* of the payment to the contractors for *each* old mail coach, so that in addition to increased speed, the Post-office acquired the opportunity of carrying vastly increased bulk at very slightly increased cost." (1)—*Taxation*, p. 107.

detering him or others from offering his suggestions when he did. Certain it is, that the proposals would have had but small chance of success, if those who had charge of the fiscal concerns of the country could have known that the sum which would have to be paid by the Post-office to railway companies alone but a very few years from that time, would not fall short of the whole amount standing for the entire postal expenditure of 1839.

In 1842, Mr. Hill, as we have before said, left the Treasury, and was thus cut off from all active supervision of his measures. Thereupon the "Mercantile Committee" appealed for redress to Sir Robert Peel, and subsequently the matter was mentioned in the House. Sir Thomas Wilde (afterwards Lord Truro) moved for the appointment of a Committee, in June, 1843. After a long debate, in which Sir Robert Peel said he "did not doubt that there were improvements still to be effected, but I presume that they can be accomplished by the constituted authorities," it was granted. The Committee, over which Sir George Clerk, the Secretary of the Treasury, was appointed chairman, consisted of eight ministerialists and seven Liberal members. Previously, however, to this date, Mr. Hill had petitioned the House of Commons. The petition—which was presented by Mr. Baring, the ex-Chancellor of the Exchequer—described briefly the Post-office measures of 1839 ; his own appointment to the Treasury ; the fact of his appointment being annulled ; the benefit of the new measures in spite of their partial execution ; the obstructive policy of the Post-office officials ; and thus concludes :—

"That the opinion adopted by Her Majesty's Government, that the further progress in Post-office improvements may be left to the Post-office itself, is contrary to all past experience, and is contradicted by measures recently adopted by that establishment.

"That, notwithstanding the extreme depression of trade which existed when the penny rate was established, and has prevailed ever since ; and notwithstanding the very imperfect manner in which your petitioner's plans have been carried into effect, the want of due economy in the Post-office, the well-known dislike entertained by many of those persons to whom its execution has been entrusted, and the influence such dislike

must necessarily have upon its success, yet the results of the third year of partial trial, as shown by a recent return made to the House of Lords, is a gross revenue of two-thirds, and a net revenue of one-third, the former amount.

“That your petitioner desires to submit the truth of the foregoing allegations to the severest scrutiny, and therefore humbly prays your honourable House will be pleased to institute an inquiry into the state of the Post-office, with the view of adopting such measures as may seem best for fully carrying into effect your petitioner's plans of Post-office improvement, and thus realizing the undoubted intentions of the Legislature.”

The prayer of the petition was granted, and its proceedings are duly chronicled.<sup>1</sup> The object of this Committee was “to inquire into the measures which have been adopted for the general introduction of a penny rate of postage, and for facilitating the conveyance of letters; the results of such measures, as far as relates to the revenue and expenditure of the Post-office and the general convenience of the country; and to report their observations thereon to the House.” Before proceeding to give any account of the further measures brought under discussion in connexion with this Committee, we must give, in a few sentences, a *résumé* of the principal improvements which had actually been carried out during the interval of the sittings of the two Committees.

1. The uniform rate of one penny for a letter not above half an ounce, with weight adopted as the standard for increase of charge.

2. The value of a system of prepayment was established,<sup>2</sup> the necessary facility being afforded by the introduction of postage-stamps. Double postage was levied on letters not prepaid.

3. Day-mails were established on the principal railway-lines running out of London, thus giving some of the principal towns

<sup>1</sup> Select Committee on the Post-office, 1843.

<sup>2</sup> In the last month of high charges, of two and a half million letters passing through the London office, nearly two millions were unpaid, and few more than half a million paid. Twelve months afterwards, the proportion of paid to unpaid letters was entirely changed: the latter had run up to the enormous number of five and a half millions; the former had shrunk to about half a million.



in the provinces one additional delivery, with two mails from the metropolis in one day.

4. An additional delivery was established in London, and two were given to some of the suburbs.

5. Colonial and foreign rates for letters were greatly lowered, the inland rates—viz. the rates paid for those letters passing through this country—being abandoned altogether in some cases, as Mr. Hill had recommended.

6. The privilege of franking, private and official, was abolished, and low charges made for the transmission of parliamentary papers.

7. Arrangements were made for the registration of letters.

8. The Money-order office was rendered available to a four-fold extent. And—

9. The number of letters increased from 75 millions in 1838-9, to 219 millions in 1842-3.<sup>1</sup>

This was certainly a large instalment of the improvements which the promoters of penny-post reform hoped to see realized ; but, at the same time, it was only an instalment. The Committee for which Mr. Hill had petitioned must now judge for themselves whether all had been done that might and ought to have been done to enhance the merits of the measure, and make it as profitable to the country as possible. In addition, it was requisite that they should consider several further suggestions which Mr. Hill had, since the introduction of his plan, proposed as likely to improve it, as well as hear him on some of the objections that had been raised to it. Thus, with regard to the latter, the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Goulbourn) had stated just before the Committee was appointed, that “the Post-office did not now pay its expenses.” This statement was startling, inasmuch as Colonel Maberly himself had given 500,000*l.* or 600,000*l.* as the proceeds of the penny postage rates in the advent year of the measure. But Mr. Hill resolved the difficulty. The inconsistency was explained quite simply, that in a return furnished by the Post-office, the whole of the cost of the packet-service—a little over 600,000*l.*—was charged against the Post-office revenue. Though the cost of the packets had

<sup>1</sup> Select Committee on Postage, 1843, p. 93.

not been charged against the Post-office for several years previously, this new item was here debited in the accounts to the prejudice of the scheme ; and Mr. Goulbourn, who disclaimed any hostility to the new measure, thought himself justified, under the circumstances, in making the statement in question.

Again : It was strongly and frequently urged that correspondence was less secure than under the old system. It was said by the Post-office officials, that the system of prepayment operated prejudicially against the security of valuable letters. Under the old *régime* it was argued, the postman was charged with a certain number of unpaid letters, and every such letter, so taxed, was a check upon him. "What security," it was now asked, "can there be for the delivery of letters for which the letter-carriers are to bring back no return ?" With prepaid letters, it was said, there was great temptation, unbounded opportunity for dishonesty, and no check. To some extent, and so far as letters containing coin or other articles of value were concerned, there were some grounds for these remarks. It is a great question whether, in the case of valuable letters, the dishonest postman would be discouraged from a depredation by the thought that he would have the postage of the letter to account for ; but still, freedom from all such considerations, under the new system, would clearly seem to increase the risks which the public would have to run. Previously to the penny postage era, all letters containing, or supposed to contain, coin or jewellery, were registered gratuitously at the Post-office as a security against their loss. Under the new system, it was considered impracticable to continue the service, and the Post-office authorities, with the sanction of the Treasury, dropped it altogether. The Money-order Office was available ; the fees had been greatly reduced, and the officials, in warning persons against sending coin in letters, strongly recommended that this office should be used for the purpose. Still, the number of coin-letters increased, and the number of depredations increased with them, to the great prejudice of the measure. Mr. Hill, whilst in the Treasury, recommended a system of registration of letters, which appears to have been somewhat similar to a plan proposed by the Post-office authorities themselves in 1838. A system of registration was the result ; but the rate of charge of

one shilling per letter was enough in itself to render the entire arrangement nugatory. In October, 1841, Lord Lowther proposed to the Treasury that they should let him put down the evil in another way, viz. that they should allow him to use his powers, under the 3 & 4 Vict. c. 96, sec. 39, to establish a *compulsory* registration of letters supposed to contain coin or jewellery, and to make the charge for such compulsory registration a shilling per letter. The Treasury Lords referred the proposal to Mr. Hill. He concurred in the opinion of the Postmaster-General, and thought the principle of compulsory registration quite fair. He pointed out, however, in a letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, many objections to the plan, and contended that, so long as the registration fee was fixed at the high rate of a shilling, inducements enough were not held out to the public to register their letters *voluntarily*. Mr. Hill, therefore, suggested that the fee should be at once lowered to sixpence, to be reduced still further as soon as practicable. The public, under a lower rate, would have little excuse for continuing a bad practice; but if it was continued, restrictive measures might *then* be tried, as the only remaining method of protecting the public from the consequences of their own imprudence. The sixpenny rate would, he thought, be remunerative; nor would the letters increase to a much greater number than that reached under the old system when they were registered gratuitously. This subject was still under discussion when the Special Committee was granted, when, of course, all the proposals relative to the registration of letters were laid before it and investigated. Strong objections were made to Mr. Hill's proposition to lower the rate. It was contended that the number of registered letters would so increase, that other Post-office work could not be accomplished. The Postmaster-General, for example, contested the principle of registration altogether, admitting, however, that it was useful in reducing the number of ordinary letters containing coin, and the consequent temptations to the officers of the Post-office. Like many of the additional proposals, this subject was left undecided; but no one at this date questions the propriety of the recommendations made under this head. The charge for registration has, within the last few years, been twice reduced, with benefit

to the revenue, and no hindrance to the general efficiency of the Post-office. Not only so, but the compulsory registration clause is now in active operation.

We cannot enter far into the minutiae of the Committee's deliberations. Mr. Hill endeavoured to show that economy in the management of the Post-office had been neglected. The number of clerks and letter-carriers which had sufficed for the complex system that had been superseded, must more than suffice for the work of the office under his simplified arrangements: yet no reduction had been made. Economy, he said, had been neglected in the way contracts had been let; in the manner railway companies were remunerated for carrying mails. He computed that the sum of 10,000*l.* a-year had been paid to these companies for space in the trains that had never been occupied. He also endeavoured to show that the salaries of nearly all the postmasters in the country needed revision; that the establishments of each should also be revised. The changes under the new system, taken together with the changes which railways had made, had had the effect of increasing the work of some offices, but greatly decreasing that of many more. He proposed that there should be a complete revision of work and wages; that postmasters should be paid on fixed salaries; and that all perquisites, with the exception of a poundage on the sale of postage-stamps, should be given up. Late-letter fees had, up to the year 1840, been received by the postmasters themselves. Under the Penny Postage Act, however, these fees went to the revenue, and compensation, at a certain fixed rate, was granted to the postmasters in lieu of them. Mr. Hill stated that the amount of compensation granted was generally too much, and was to be accounted for on the ground that the postmasters had, in all the cases, made their own returns.

Mr. Hill's principal recommendations to this committee were—

- (1) The plan of a cheap registration of letters.
- (2) That *all* inland letters should be prepaid (care being taken that postmasters should be supplied with a sufficient stock of postage-stamps), and double postage charged for all unpaid letters.
- (3) Reduction in the staff of officers till the number of letters increased to five or sixfold; that the London officers should be

fully and not only partially employed ; and that female employment might be encouraged in the provinces. (4) Simplification in the mode of assorting letters. (5) The adoption of measures to induce the public to facilitate the operations of the Post-office —by giving complete and legible addresses to letters, by making slits in house-doors, and other means. (6) The establishment of a greater number of rural post-offices, till, eventually, there should be one set up in every village. (7) All restrictions as to the weight of parcels to be removed, and a book-packet rate to be established, with arrangements for conveying prints, maps, &c. &c. That railway stations should have post-offices connected with them, and that letter-sorting should be done on board the packets, were among his miscellaneous suggestions.

With especial reference to the London office, Mr. Hill again recommended : (1) The union of the two corps of general and district letter-carriers ; (2) The establishment of district offices ; (3) An hourly delivery of letters instead of one every two hours, the first delivery to be finished by nine o'clock.

Nearly the whole of these recommendations were combated—and successfully so—by the officers of the Post-office, though it is certainly remarkable that, in the face of their opinions, the great majority of the proposals have subsequently been carried out with unquestioned advantage to the service. It would be a weary business to relate the objections made and the exceptions taken to each recommendation as it came up to be considered. If any of our readers are anxious to continue the subject we can promise them that they will now and then find an oasis in the desert of blue book which treats of it, but little more than that. Of course, the *non possumus* argument was frequently introduced and adhered to. Colonel Maberly said it was an impossibility that there should be hourly deliveries in London.<sup>1</sup> A post-office in every village was impracticable, or, if practicable, quite unnecessary ; and so on. We need only add that the labours of the Committee led to little practical result. They decided, by a majority of four, not to report any judgment

<sup>1</sup> Like the late eminent Dr. Lardner, who wrote an article in the *Quarterly* to demonstrate that no steamer could possibly cross the Atlantic, and very soon afterwards availed himself of an achievement he had pronounced impossible ; so Colonel Maberly now enjoys, we suppose, the benefits of the frequent deliveries in London, against the possibility of which *he* pronounced.

on the matter. Though this result is not to be wondered at, considering that the majority were ardent supporters of the Government that had dismissed him, it must have been very unsatisfactory to Mr. Hill and all who thought with him. By refusing, however, to exonerate the Post-office from the charges brought against it, the Committee virtually found for the reformer. With regard to Mr. Hill's further suggestions they refer to the evidence, "and entertain no doubt that his propositions will receive the fullest consideration" from the Treasury and the Post-office. So they did eventually after some two or three weary years of waiting, and when the Government was again changed. It is only fair to remark here that after Mr. Hill had been re-installed and set to work upon these various measures, Conservative Ministers no less than the Whig ones worked quite cordially with him, thus proving that they had more confidence in him than their Tory predecessors of 1843, and perhaps that they had little sympathy with the motives which had led to his exclusion. Mr. Hill at this time, however, had no alternative but to leave the whole matter in the hands of the Government, and this he did by taking a place as director of the London and Brighton Railway, at which board he was subsequently appointed chairman. We will close this chapter with his own parting words, addressed to the country at the time when he withdrew from all interference with, or superintendence over, his proposals. "The errors now attending the working of the plan I view with deep regret. Though not in circumstances to disregard the emoluments of office, and far from being so stoical as to slight the pleasure of working out my own plan, I think I can honestly say that I believe my great object has been the measure itself; and that my great regret is to see its benefits impaired or perverted. This, unhappily, I cannot prevent; but I retire with, I hope, the well-founded confidence of having spared no effort; and with the consolation—I must admit rather a selfish one—of feeling that if the present rash course be attended with loss to the revenue, or ill repute either to the plan or financial improvement generally, these are evils for which I cannot be held in any way responsible."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The State and Prospects of Penny Postage.* By Rowland Hill. C. Knight and Co. 1844.

## CHAPTER XII.

## THE LETTER-OPENING COMMITTEE OF 1844, AND THE COMMISSION ON SUNDAY LABOUR AT THE POST-OFFICE IN 1849.

It will be fresh in the memory of many readers, that the year 1844 revealed to the public certain usages of the Government, and a branch of Post-office business—previously kept carefully in the dark—which went far to destroy the confidence of the nation in the sanctity of its correspondence. In the session of 1844, Mr. Thomas S. Duncombe presented a petition from Mr. W. J. Linton, M. Mazzini, and two other persons residing at 47, Devonshire Street, Queen's Square, complaining that their letters were regularly detained and opened at the Post-office. The petitioners declared that they “considered such a practice, introducing the spy-system of foreign states, as repugnant to every principle of the British constitution, and subversive of that public confidence which was so essential to a commercial country.” The petitioners prayed for an inquiry, and Mr. Duncombe supported their prayer. Sir James Graham, then Home Secretary, got up in the House, and stated that, as regarded three of the petitioners, their letters had not been detained; as for the case of M. Mazzini, a warrant had been obtained from the Home-office to stop and open the correspondence of that person. He had the power by law and he had exercised it. “The authority,” said Sir James, “was vested in the responsible Ministers of the Crown, and was intrusted to them for the public safety; and while Parliament placed its confidence in the individual exercising such a power, it was not for the public good to pry or inquire into the particular causes which called for the exercise thereof.”<sup>1</sup> He hoped the House would confide in his motives, and that they would not call upon

*Hansard*, vol. lxx. pp. 892-9.

him to answer any further inquiries. Mr. Duncombe rose to reply, upon which a question of order was raised. Mr. Duncombe demanded to be heard on a case of urgent personal grievance: "the petitioners," said he, "sought for justice, and as far as his efforts could avail, justice they should have." He then went on to address the House vehemently, and commented strongly on the Home Secretary's refusal to give a full reply. "It was a power," said Duncombe, "which ought to be taken away from any Secretary of State, particularly when exercised in such an unscrupulous manner as it had been within the last two years." He then went into the history of the system. "In the time of Mr. Pitt and Lord Sidmouth, when letters were opened they were always marked with the words 'opened by authority'; at present the case was different; whilst the Secretary of State retained the same system of espionage, instead of marking the letters thus, they were returned so skilfully closed, that the individual to whom they were addressed was totally ignorant of the fact of their having been so opened." Mr. Wallace next spoke, and in the old exaggerated vein pictured the separate room set apart for the work at the Post-office, and went on to say that he "believed that persons had been sent abroad, to study in the school of Fouché how to open, fold, and seal letters carefully." "At the time when franking was the privilege of members," Mr. Wallace continued, he "used to write upon the outside of his letters and franks, 'Please to re-seal and forward this letter after you have read it, and do not burn it.'" Sir James Graham was urged to give more explanation, but he said that having had notice of the motion, he had been quite prepared with his answer, and he had gone as far in explanation as he intended to go. In this, we think, lay his mistake, and the mistake was a fatal one, as it added fuel to the flame. Had the Home Secretary entered more fully into the matter, and carefully given the law as it stood, it is probable that the subject might have been allowed to drop. Nor did Sir James Graham's manner, which was somewhat brusque, improve matters. A few days elapsed, and public attention was thoroughly roused; the subject came home to every letter-writer; it was openly stated by the press that a gigantic system of espionage had established itself at St. Martin's-le-Grand, and that, if con-



fidence had to be restored, the whole question must be laid open to a searching investigation. In the midst of all this excitement and rancour, we may be sure that Sir James Graham was not spared. The fact was, he was abused most unreasonably. Instead of speaking of the system, or, at any rate, of the Executive Government, who, with Sir James, shared an equal responsibility, there was hardly a public print or public speaker in the kingdom that did not seek to heap insults or expressions of disgust on his name. This state of things could not continue; accordingly, we find that the Earl of Radnor moved, without notice, in the House of Lords, for a return of all warrants which had been issued for the detention of letters during a certain period, in the course of which he loudly denounced the practice of issuing general warrants to intercept all letters for a certain person, instead of separate warrants for each letter.<sup>1</sup> This mode of proceeding, he truly urged, was a violation of the statute. Lord Campbell thought the question rather a matter for a court of justice than the House of Lords. Lord Brougham observed that the first statute conferring this power had been framed by Lord Somers. It had been continued by various Acts, and had been exercised by all the Governments downwards. His opinion was, that nothing but absolute necessity for the safety of the State would justify the arrangement. The sooner they had a new Act the better. Lord Denman was for putting an end to the power altogether. The return was granted, the Duke of Wellington approving the Home Secretary's conduct notwithstanding.

On the 24th of June, 1844, Mr. Duncombe again called the attention of the House of Commons to the subject, by presenting a petition from Mr. Charles Stolzman, a Polish refugee, complaining that his letters had been detained and opened. Mr. Duncombe contended that the Act of 1837 never meant to confer an authority upon a Minister of the Crown to search out the secrets of exiles resident in this country at the instance of foreign Governments, but was only designed to meet the case of domestic treason. "Mr. Stolzman was a friend of M. Mazzini," said Mr. Duncombe, "and this was why his letters had been tampered with." After describing the way in which

<sup>1</sup> *Hansard*, lxxv. pp. 975-9.

letters were opened, he concluded a most powerful speech by again moving for a Committee of Inquiry. He did not want to know Government secrets ; he doubted if they were worth knowing ; but he wanted inquiry into the practice of the department, which he contended was unconstitutional and contrary to law. Sir James Graham, without entering into any further explanation, except saying that the law had not been violated, and that if it had, the hon. member might prove it before a legal tribunal, objected strongly, and in almost a defiant manner, to any Committee. Mr. Macaulay, Lord Howick, Mr. Sheil, and Lord John Russell warmly supported the motion for an inquiry. Sir Robert Peel, Lord Stanley, and Mr. Monckton Milnes opposed it, when it was rejected by a majority of forty-four. What party speeches failed in doing, the clamour and popular tumult outside at length accomplished. Popular ridicule settled upon the subject ; pencil and pen set to work upon it with a will. Newspapers were unusually, and sometimes unreasonably, free in their comments, and all kinds of stories about the Post-office went the round of the press. Sir James Graham had to bear the brunt of the whole business ; whereas the entire Cabinet, but especially Lord Aberdeen, the Foreign Secretary, ought equally to have shared the opprobrium. As it was, the bearing of the Home Secretary in the House of Commons was singularly unwise and unadroit. The subject had now come to be regarded as of too great public importance to be suffered to rest ; besides, it was an attractive one for the Opposition side of the House. Mr. Duncombe renewed his motion towards the end of July in the same session. It was in a slightly altered form, inasmuch as he now moved for a Select Committee "to inquire into a department of Her Majesty's Post-office commonly called 'the secret or inner office,' the duties and employment of the persons engaged therein, and the authority under which the functions of the said office were discharged." Mr. Duncombe made some startling statements as to the mode and extent of the practice of letter-opening, all of which he declared he could prove if the Committee was granted. The Government saw the necessity of giving way, in order that the public mind might be quieted. The Home Secretary now acknowledged, that since he was last questioned on the subject, the matter had assumed

a very serious aspect, and he thought it was time that the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, should be told. Though he would have readily endured the obloquy cast upon him, even though it should crush him, rather than injure the public service; and though he had endured much, especially after the votes and speeches of the Opposition leaders—all men conversant with official duties—in favour of Mr. Duncombe's former motions, he now felt himself relieved from his late reserve, and felt bound to confess that he believed it to be impossible to maintain the power confided to him longer without a full inquiry. He would now not only consent to the Committee, but would desire that it should make the fullest possible inquiry, and he would promise on his part, not only to state all he knew, but lend all the resources of his department to attain that object. In accordance with this determination, he proposed that the Committee should be a secret one, invested with the amplest powers to commence the investigation at once, and should be composed of five usually voting against the Government, viz. Sir C. Lemon, Mr. Warburton, Mr. Strutt, Mr. Orde, and the O'Connor Don; and four who generally supported them, viz. Lord Sandon (chairman), Mr. T. Baring, Sir W. Heathcote, and Mr. H. Drummond. "To this Committee," said Sir James, "I gladly submit my personal honour and my official conduct, and I make my submission without fear." The Committee was appointed after Mr. Wilson Patten's name had been substituted for Mr. Drummond's, on account of the latter being a lawyer; and after an unsuccessful attempt to add Mr. Duncombe's name, which was rejected by 128 to 52. Its object was "to inquire into the state of the law with respect to the detaining of letters in the General Post-office, and to the mode in which that power had been exercised, and that the Committee should have power to send for persons, papers, and records, and to report the result of their inquiry to the House. A Committee of the House of Lords was appointed at the same time. Sir James Graham's examination lasted four days, when he fulfilled his pledge to make a full and unreserved disclosure of all he knew. Almost all the members of that and former Governments were examined. Lord John Russell confessed to having done the same as Sir James Graham when he held the seals of the Home-office,

though he had not used the power so frequently. He also stated that he supported Mr. Duncombe in his previous motions for inquiry, because he thought it necessary that the public should have the information asked for. Lord Normanby had used the power in Ireland for detecting "low Ribbonism, which could not be *ferreted out* by other means." Lord Tankerville testified to the existence of a warrant signed by Mr. Fox in 1782, ordering the detention and opening of all letters addressed to foreign ministers; another, ordering that all the letters addressed to Lord George Gordon should be opened. Witnesses were also brought from the Post-office. Mr. Duncombe, on being asked for the witnesses which he had promised, who would substantiate his allegations, refused to hand in a list of them, except the Committee would allow him to be present during the investigation. This was refused. Thereupon Mr. Duncombe appealed to the House, but the decision of the Committee was confirmed.

No inconsiderable part of the Committee's time was taken up in the production and examination of records, Acts, and precedents bearing on the subject. The officers of the State Paper-office, and other Government functionaries, produced records and State papers of great importance, from which the student of postal history may learn many interesting particulars. Some of these details as to early letter-opening we have already presented to the reader. During the last century, it would seem from the evidence produced, the practice of granting warrants was exceedingly common; and they might be had on the most trivial pretences. The English Government might then have vied with that of any of the Continental Powers. Further, it was not the practice to record such warrants regularly in any official book,<sup>1</sup> and few are so recorded: we can only guess at their number from the frequent mention made of them in the State trials of the period, and in other incidental ways. In 1723, at Bishop Atterbury's trial, copies of his letters were produced and given in evidence against him. A clerk from the Post-office certified to the fact that they had passed through the post, and that he had seen them opened, read, and copied. Atterbury, as well he might, asked for the authority for this practice; and especially,

<sup>1</sup> *Report of Secret Committee, 1844, p. 9.*

if the Secretary of State had directed that his letters should be interfered with? A majority in the House of Lords decided that the question should not be answered. It is pleasant to relate that twenty-nine peers recorded an indignant protest against this decision. One of them proposed to cross-examine the Rev. (!) Edward Willes, "one of His Majesty's Post-office decipherers," but the majority, going to a still greater length, resolved: "That it is the opinion of this House that it is not consistent with the public safety to ask the decipherers any questions which may tend to *discover the art or mystery of deciphering*."<sup>1</sup> Again, at the trial of Horne Tooke for high treason in 1795, a letter written to him by Mr. Joyce, a printer, was intercepted at the Post-office, and was stated by the prisoner to be the immediate occasion of his apprehension. On his requiring its production, a duly certified copy was brought into court by the Crown officers and given in evidence.

Twelve years after the trial of Bishop Atterbury, members of both Houses became alarmed for the safety of their correspondence, and succeeded in getting up an agitation on the subject. Several members of the House of Commons complained that their letters had been opened. Revelations were made at this time which remind us strongly of the episode of 1844, both discussions resulting in a Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry. It was stated in the debate of 1735, that the liberty which the Act gave "could serve no purpose but to enable the idle clerks about the office to pry into the private affairs of every merchant and gentleman in the kingdom."<sup>2</sup> It transpired on this occasion that a regular organization existed, at enormous expense, for the examination of home and foreign correspondence. The Secretary of the Post-office stated that the greater part of 45,000*l.* had been paid, without voucher of any kind, to Robert, Earl of Oxford, for defraying the expenses of this establishment. Among the principal annual expenses were the salaries of the chief decipherers<sup>3</sup> (Dr. Willes and his son), 1,000*l.*; the second deci-

<sup>1</sup> *Lords' Journal*, xii. pp. 183-6.

<sup>2</sup> *Commons' Journal*, vol. xxii. p. 462.

<sup>3</sup> The place was not only lucrative, but in the path of promotion. We find that, for the proper performance of these very unclerical duties, the Rev. Dr. was first rewarded with the Deanery of Lincoln and afterwards with the Bishopric of St. David's.

pherer, 800*l.* ; the third, 500*l.* ; four clerks, 1,600*l.* ; doorkeeper, 50*l.* ; incidental charges, but principally for seals, 100*l.* The result of the inquiry was, that the Committee condemned the practice, and the House declared that it was a breach of privilege on the part of the Government to use the power except in the exact manner described in the statute.

Whether any real improvement took place may best be judged by the following circumstances. Walpole, who doubtless carried his prerogative in those matters beyond any two Secretaries of State we could mention, lent his ear to both public and private applications alike, issuing warrants even to further cases of private tyranny. In the Report of the Secret Committee, p. 12, we find that a warrant was granted, in 1741, for what purpose may be judged by the following: “At the request of A, a warrant is issued to permit A’s eldest son to open and inspect any letters which A’s youngest son might write to two females, one of which that youngest son had imprudently married.” And this inquisitorial spirit, beginning with the highest, descended even to the lowest class of officials. Mr. E. Edwards in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, vol. xviii. p. 405 (quoting from the *State Trials*, vol. xviii. p. 1369), tells us, in relation to this subject, that so little attention was paid to the requirements of the Act of Queen Anne, or the Committee of the House of Commons just referred to, that the very bellmen took to scrutinizing the letters given them for their bags. One of those functionaries was examined at the trial of Dr. Hensey in 1758, and deposed as follows: “When I have got all my letters together I carry them home and sort them. In sorting them I observed that the letters I received of Dr. Hensey were generally directed abroad and to foreigners; and I, knowing the Doctor to be a Roman Catholic, advised the examining-clerk at the office to inspect his letters.” This witness, in answer to the questions, “How came you to know Dr. Hensey to be a Roman Catholic?” and “What had you to do with his religion?” clinched his evidence thus: “We letter-carriers and postmen have great opportunities to know the characters and dispositions of gentlemen, from their servants, connexions, and correspondents. But, to be plain, if I once learn that a person who lives a genteel life is a Roman Catholic, I immediately look upon him as one who,

by education and principle, is an inveterate enemy to my king and country !”

At the beginning of the present century an improvement was carried out. It was seen that the indiscriminate issue of the warrants was stimulated and fostered by the fact that no account was kept of them. As a means of placing a necessary check upon the officers, Lord Spencer, then Home Secretary, introduced the custom in 1806, of recording the dates of all warrants granted, and the purposes for which they were issued. Since the year 1822, the whole of the warrants themselves have been preserved at the Home-office. In comparing the number of warrants issued by different Home Secretaries during the present century, we find that Sir James Graham enjoys the unenviable notoriety of having granted the greatest number, though the fact is partly explained by the commotion which the Chartists made in the north of England, 1842-3.

The revelations made in the two Committees with reference to foreign correspondence, especially that of foreign Ministers accredited at the English Court, were very remarkable, and not likely to induce confidence in our postal arrangements on the part of other Powers. It was shown that in times of war whole foreign mails had been known to have been detained, and the letters almost individually examined. The Lords' Committee went so far as to say it was clear, “that it had been for a long period of time and under successive administrations, up to the present time, an established practice that the foreign correspondence of foreign Ministers passing through the General Post-office should be sent to a department of the Foreign-office, before the forwarding of such correspondence, according to the address.” What the feelings of foreign Governments were at this revelation may well be imagined. They would know, of course, that the English Government, hundreds of years ago, had not scrupled to lay violent hands on the letters of their representatives, if by any possibility they could get hold of them. When Wolsey, for example, wanted possession of the letters of the ambassadors of Charles V. he went to work very openly, having ordered “a watche should be made” in and about London, and all persons going *en route* to the Continent to be questioned and searched. “One riding towards Brayne-

ford," says an early record, "when examyned by the watche, answered so closely, that upon suspicion thereof, they searched him, and found secretly hyd aboute hym a paquet of letters in French." In the reign of Queen Mary, Gardiner ordered that the messengers of Noailles, the French ambassador, should be taken and searched in much the same manner.<sup>1</sup> Notwithstanding this, they would scarcely be prepared for the information that later Governments, with less to fear, had preferred more secret measures, establishing a system of espionage which was certainly not in accordance with the English character, or likely to subserve the interests of peace in Europe. That the arrangement with regard to foreign mails was unlawful, may be judged by the prompt action which was taken in the matter. "Since June, 1844, the Postmaster-General," so runs the Lords' Report two months later, "having had his attention called to the fact that there was no sufficient authority for this practice, has discontinued it altogether."

The Commons' Committee reported that the letter-opening warrants might be divided into two classes—(1) Those issued in furtherance of criminal justice, usually for the purpose of affording some clue to the hiding-place of an offender, or to the mode or place of concealment of property. (2) Those issued for the purpose of discovering the designs of persons known or suspected to be engaged in proceedings dangerous to the State, or deeply involving British interests, from being carried on in the United Kingdom. In the case of both classes of warrants, the mode of proceeding was nearly similar. The first were issued on the application of the law-officers; the principal Secretary of State himself determined when to issue the latter. No record was kept of the grounds on which the second class of warrants were issued. "The letters which have been detained and opened are," according to the Committee,<sup>2</sup> "unless retained by special order, as sometimes happens in criminal cases, closed and resealed *without affixing any mark to indicate that they have been so detained and opened*, and are forwarded by post according to their respective superscriptions." They then classed the warrants issued during the present century in the following

<sup>1</sup> Froude.

<sup>2</sup> Report of Secret Committee, 1844, pp. 14—17.



way :—For thefts, murders, and frauds, 162 ; for treason and sedition, 77 ; foreign correspondence, 20 ; prisoners of war, 13 ; miscellaneous, 11 ; and for uncertain purposes, 89. Undoubtedly, with one class of letters, the Government were only performing a duty in applying the law as laid down in 1 Vict. c. 33. The information obtained by the warrants to find the *locale* of Chartist disaffection was described by the Committee as most valuable and useful to the Government. While the whole history of the transaction in question grates unpleasantly on English ears, there can be no doubt that in other cases—such as frauds on the banks and revenue, forgeries, murders, &c.—the power was used impartially to the advantage of individuals and the benefit of the State. Whether, however, the discoveries and the benefits were so many as to counterbalance the odium of countenancing what was so like a public crime, and which violated public confidence in the Post-office, or whether the issue of a few warrants annually, in proportion to the 40,000 committals<sup>1</sup> which took place yearly at that time, could by any means be called an efficient instrument of police, are vastly different questions. With regard to the general question of letter-opening, the issue was altogether vague and uncertain. Though the *practical* end of the inquiry was, no doubt, gained, and warrants may be said to have ceased, still the Committees recommended Parliament to decide that the power and prerogative of opening letters, under certain given circumstances, should *not* be abrogated. They argued that, if the *right* of the Secretary of State was denied, it would be equivalent to advertising to every criminal conspirator against the public peace, that he might employ the Post-office with impunity.<sup>2</sup> It was decided, in consequence of this finding, that the law should remain unaltered.

Mr. Duncombe was not satisfied. In the next session he attempted to revive the subject by calling the attention of the House to “the evasive and unsatisfactory character of the report of the Secret Committee,” and moving the appointment of a Select Committee to investigate the whole subject over again ; but he met with little success. Sir J. Graham, Sir R. Peel,

<sup>1</sup> Report of the Secret Committee, 1844, pp. 14—17.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* Commons' Committee.

Viscount Sandon, Mr. Warburton, Mr. Ward, and Lord John Manners, spoke against his motion, which he then withdrew. Upon this, Lord Howick tried to carry a resolution for the appointment of a Committee to inquire into the case of Mr. Duncombe's letters only. Mr. Disraeli seconded the motion, desiring not to have the Government censured, but to see the practice condemned. Mr. Roebuck believed that the country would not be content until the invidious power intrusted to the Secretary of State respecting letter-opening was absolutely abolished. Lord John Russell spoke against the motion, which was lost, after a fierce debate, of three nights, by 240 to 145 members.<sup>1</sup> After a few days' repose, Mr. Duncombe moved that Colonel Maberly should attend at the bar, and produce certain books connected with his office. The Home Secretary resisted the motion, grounding his objection on the finding of the two Committees, as well as on the necessities of the public service. Lord John Russell and the other Liberal leaders concurring, the motion was negatived by 188 to 113.<sup>2</sup> It was some time before the subject was again mentioned, and might now have dropped, but for the unfortunate occurrence in Italy, which resulted in the death of the brothers Bandieri, which many traced to the action of the English Government. Mr. Shiel hereupon moved a resolution on the 1st of April, 1845, expressing regret that the Government had opened Mazzini's letters, thus frustrating the political movement in Italy. Only thirty-eight in a full house affirmed this proposition. After a motion from Mr. Wakley, and another from Mr. Duncombe, lost by 161 to 78, this long controversy was finally set at rest.

The English people, it must be added, all along objected less to the *power* which the Government possessed in the exercise of its discretion than to the *manner* in which that power was exercised. Mr. Duncombe's statements during the earlier stages of the discussions, relating to the "secret office"—never denied—could not be forgotten by the public when they intrusted their letters to the custody of the Post-office. The revelations in question caused "a perfect paroxysm of national anger," because it was felt, throughout the length and breadth of the land, that such arrangements were repugnant to every feeling of

<sup>1</sup> *Hansard*, lxxvii. p. 1,025.<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* lxxx.

Englishmen. Had the officers of the Government broken open letters in the same way as, under certain circumstances, the law allows the sheriff's officers to break open houses and writing-desks, there might still have been complainings, but these complainings would neither have been so loud nor yet so justifiable.<sup>1</sup> There was something in the melting apparatus, in the tobacco-pipe, in the forged plaster of paris seals, in the official letter-picker, and in the place where, and manner how, he did his work, utterly disgusting to John Bull, and most unsuitable to the atmosphere of England. The law, it is true, remains unaltered, but it is believed to be virtually a dead letter.

The year 1849 is principally remarkable for the agitation which occurred throughout the country in respect to Sunday labour at the Post-office. A few words must suffice to explain the state of matters before this time. From the earliest establishment of the Post-office, no letter delivery took place in the metropolis on the first day of the week. Up to 1849, the whole of the Sunday work at the General Post-office, consisted of that connected with the receipt of certain kinds of government and official letters, attended to by a single clerk and three messengers. In the provincial towns and throughout the country the arrangements were quite different, and letter delivery on Sundays had existed from the earliest times. This state of things might have continued with mutual satisfaction, but for a hitch in the machinery of operations, through which the one interest suffered by the arrangements for the other—a large number of provincial letters being detained in London *in transitu* for full thirty-six hours. Our readers will remember that we have frequently spoken of the importance of the chief office as a “forwarding office;” of London being a centre from which radiated innumerable lines

<sup>1</sup> Among many expressions of opinion to which the inquiry on the subject gave rise, we find the following characteristic effusion from Thomas Carlyle: “It is a question vital to us that sealed letters in an English Post-office be, as we all fancied they were, respected as things sacred; that opening of men's letters, a practice near of kin to picking men's pockets, and to other still viler and far fataler forms of scoundrelism, be not resorted to in England, except in cases of the very last extremity. When some new Gunpowder Plot may be in the wind, some double-dyed high treason, or imminent national wreck not avoidable otherwise, then let us open letters; not till then. To all Austrian Kaisers and such like, in their time of trouble, let us answer, as our fathers from of old have answered—Not by such means is help here for you.”

of road ; and that no better arrangement could be made for certain classes of letters passing between remote districts than sending them "forward" through the metropolis. Not only so, but there were the "through letters," letters for instance sent from the North or West for places in Kent or Sussex or other districts beyond London ; and these as well as the "forward" correspondence were inevitably detained by this flaw in the system. A remedy was now proposed with the object of meeting this obstruction, but only after other means had been tried in provincial offices to prevent these letters going to London at all (expedients, it should be stated, which caused much expenditure of extra labour in the country). It was now determined that *forward* bags, containing these letters, should be opened and sorted at the General Post-office on Sunday mornings, and forwarded hence by the night mails in the evening. The extra work was to be done by twenty-six men, who should work only between the hours of eight and ten in the morning, who should *volunteer* for the duty, and only take it in turns. The Post-master-General might have fired a train to judge by the commotion that ensued. This simple-enough measure, which really ended in a permanent reduction of work, caused a great excitement in London and also in some provincial towns. Petitions were poured in to the two Houses of Parliament, signed by nearly as many people as expressed a wish to have the boon of penny postage. The Lord's Day Observance Society led the agitation ; hence the prayer of the various petitioners sought, to a great extent, a common object. The burden of the petitions was, that (1) there should be no delivery or despatch of letters throughout the country on the Sunday ; and (2) for a total stoppage of all mail conveyance on that day. Of course public opinion, especially in the provinces, was divided on the subject. Many good men held the opinion that they were not violating the sanctity of the Sabbath by receiving their correspondence, and that they might as well have the whole as only a part of it on that day. However selfish this endeavour to keep a large staff of officers constantly employed, Sunday after Sunday, in provincial towns, may appear, we would not attempt to dispute with them the ground they took. The agitation gave birth to various published letters, among which, perhaps the most

important was one from Dr. Vaughan, the late Head-Master of Harrow School, and now the respected vicar of Doncaster. He protested against the contemplated change being considered an "affront to religion or a violation of the rights of conscience." For this expression of opinion very ably defended, he had to run the gauntlet of several clerical pamphleteers. As a result of the movement, a motion for an address to the Queen, praying that the Sunday delivery might be stopped all over the country, was made in the House of Commons and carried by a large majority. An able writer in commenting<sup>1</sup> upon this vote would have us believe that the success which attended the mover and his "pious coadjutors" was owing to the allurements of a court ball held the same night, where all but the *unco gude* of our senators danced attendance! It is much more reasonable to suppose that the members of the House of Commons were mistaken as to the feeling of the nation, or that they were disposed to think, as many still think, that if the people of London could wait for *their* letters with becoming patience till Monday morning, the population of other large towns might also do so. Actuated doubtless by the same feeling, Lord John Russell, who was at the head of the Government, gave way to this expression of opinion. The same reviewer, with another departure from the staid proprieties of the venerable organ in which he writes, tells us that the Premier granted the prayer to punish the House for its bigotry. But such trifling with legislation would have ill become his character, or that of his cabinet, and is certainly not consonant with the known and felt importance of the subject. However it was, there was soon great dissatisfaction at the working of the new measures throughout the country. We can all easily imagine the result to the tens of thousands to whom their budget of letters on a Sunday morning offered their only occupation, and how they would be ready to resent this infraction of their time-honoured privilege. A noisy minority, even supposing they were not more than a minority, would soon make themselves formidable in complaint, and this they seem to have neglected no opportunity of doing.

A re-action set in—and nothing was so certain as this re-action—and the subject was remitted to a Commission of Inquiry,

<sup>1</sup> *Edinburgh Review*, No. cccxl. pp. 74, 75.

consisting of Lord Clanricarde,<sup>1</sup> Mr. Labouchere, and the late Sir George Cornwall Lewis. On the strength of the report of this commission, the work at the General Post-office—somewhat altered by being thrown more into the travelling offices—was continued, and Sunday delivery in England, with a few exceptions (where the arrangement is the same as in Scotch towns), was restored from that time to this. The report in question, from its general importance, as well as the fairness and candour which characterize it, deserves a few words in passing. It opened with the following sentence: "In exercising the monopoly of postal conveyance, the Government as it appears to us, takes upon itself the duty of forwarding the public correspondence without any delay which may not be demanded by reasons of the most cogent nature." They then went into the history of Sunday duty; noticed that the Post-office was not the only branch of the public service in which a certain amount of Sunday labour was required; and showed how derangement followed from exceptional working. The recommendation made with regard to the London office, with special reference to the *casus belli*, was that the arrangement in force should be continued. With respect to provincial offices that one delivery of letters should be made on the Sunday morning, the delivery not to interfere with the hours of divine service; and that as far as possible every post-office should be closed at 10 A.M. on Sundays. Further, they recommended that where the duties were "such as to prevent a rural letter-carrier from attending divine service, an arrangement should be made for providing a substitute at least on the alternate Sundays;" that, in retaining a Sunday delivery in a rural district, the Postmaster-General should be "guided by the prevalent feeling of the district;" and, in conclusion, that every householder be allowed to "suspend the delivery of letters at his own house in either town or country, if he chooses to do so." The whole of these recommendations have been carried out, and from time to time different portions of Sunday duty have been dispensed with. Rural messengers travel less; the post-

<sup>1</sup> We would take this opportunity of noting that much of the successful carrying out of the penny-postage reform, and the development of many of Sir R. Hill's subsequent plans, treated of in the next chapter, is due to the Marquis of Clanricarde, who, when at the head of postal affairs, devoted an unusual amount of energy and attention to the department.

offices in the major part of English and Scotch villages are not opened ; and, since 1850, the Sunday day-mails have almost entirely ceased running. On the whole, it cannot be said that the fullest licence was not, and is not still given, to the entire population, or that the different tastes and feelings of each class have not been consulted. Apart from the consideration that post-office officials in the provinces seem to be less cared for in the way of Sunday rest and Sunday privileges than those in the metropolis, we cannot find any ground for dissatisfaction with the footing upon which the matter was eventually placed.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE POST-OFFICE.

FROM the year 1844 to the present time the progress of the Post-office institution has been great and unexampled. Among Mr. Hill's minor proposals were those for the institution of day-mails, the establishment of rural posts, and the extension of free deliveries. The period between the passing of the Penny Postage Act and the year 1850 saw these useful suggestions carried out to an extent which proved highly beneficial to the public. With regard to the day-mails, Mr. Hill proposed that on the *morning* of each day, as well as evening, mails should leave London after certain country and continental mails had arrived, by which means letters, instead of remaining nearly twenty-four hours in London, might be at once forwarded to their addresses, and two mails per diem be thus given to most English towns. The Earl of Lichfield would seem to have seen the useful and practicable nature of these proposals, for, being Postmaster-General at the time, he did not wait to adopt them till the passing of the Act of 1839. As early as 1838 one or two day-mails were established, running out of London. Before 1850 we find the list included those of Dover, Southampton, Bristol, Birmingham, and Cambridge. These day-mails are now established on every considerable line of railway in the kingdom. London, in 1864, possesses not only day-mails on all the lines running from the metropolis, but one to Ireland, and two by different routes into Scotland. Further, a great number of railways in the United Kingdom have stipulated to take mails by any passenger-train.

Mr. Hill also contemplated the establishment of rural posts in every village. This work had been started on the introduction of penny postage, but in 1842 there were still hundreds of registrar's districts without postal accommodation. Up to Mr. Hill's time the urban districts were miserably supplied with



post-offices, and those only were set up on guarantees being furnished to the Post-office. Hence the name of "Guarantee Posts," called also "Fifth Clause Posts," and "Convention Posts," inasmuch as the Post-office paid only a portion of the expenses, the remainder being made up by local exertions in the district. Mr. Hill, in 1838, and again in 1843, urged the adoption of a plan to furnish a post-office throughout every registrar's district in England and Wales; then to adopt a similar arrangement if it succeeded for Scotland and Ireland; and finally to establish a means of delivering letters in every village throughout the kingdom without any extra charge. He was satisfied that a system of rural posts—such as this—which might be entirely established for 70,000*l.* would soon be profitable, and he instanced the beneficial working of the *poste rurale* in France. There are now more than 8,000 additional rural post-offices since 1839, the erection of which has done all for the public and the Post-office revenue that Mr. Hill anticipated.

The extension of free deliveries, also strongly urged by Mr. Hill, has progressed fairly from that time to this. Round each provincial town there used to be drawn a cordon, letters, &c. for places beyond which had either to be brought by private messengers, or were charged an extra sum on delivery as a gratuity to the postmaster. From year to year new places have been included in these free deliveries; soon the most remote and inaccessible parts of our country—the nooks and crannies of our land—will enjoy nearly equal privileges with our large towns, more rural messengers being appointed as this work approaches completion.

In 1848, the advantages of a book-post were granted to the country. By the new rate, a single volume might be sent to any part of the United Kingdom at the uniform rate of sixpence per pound. The privileges of this book-post were gradually extended to the colonies. The railway companies, at the time and subsequently, complained loudly that the Post-office, by establishing the book-post, had entered into an unfair competition with them. This competition was described as very injurious, on account of the low rates at which books and book-packets were conveyed. It was answered, however—and in this answer the country very generally agreed—that the

railway companies had no legal or equitable right to the monopoly of parcel-traffic; and if they had, the exceptions taken in the case of the book-post were only to books and printed matter intimately connected with objects such as the diffusion of knowledge and the promotion of education—matters with which the Post-office was now most immediately concerned. The facts, however, were, that very few indeed of the packets sent by the book-post were such as had been previously sent by railway. The Post-office, by offering its vast machinery for the transmission of such articles, especially to remote districts, gave facilities which had never before been offered, and which caused books and documents to pass through the Post-office which otherwise, had no book-post existed, would not have been sent through any other channel. A Select Committee, which sat in 1854, on the conveyance of mails by railway, took evidence on this point, and in their report stated it as their opinion, that a large proportion of the packets sent would not have been so forwarded but for the facilities offered by the Post-office in their distribution.

Any loss, however, which the railways might experience in this respect was more than counterbalanced when the Executive abolished the compulsory impressed stamp on newspapers, this arrangement giving rise to a conveyance of newspaper-parcels by railway-trains to an enormous extent, and proportionately lessening the work and profits of the Post-office.

In 1855 the Postmaster-General, the late Lord Canning, commenced the practice of furnishing the Lords of the Treasury, and through them the public, with annual reports on the Post-office. These reports, which have been continued up to the present time, show the progress of the Department from year to year, and present to the general reader, as well as to the statistician, a vast mass of interesting information carefully and lucidly compiled.<sup>1</sup> Lord Canning, in recommending the adoption of the plan, gave as one reason, among many, that the Post-office service was constantly expanding and improving, but that information respecting postal matters, especially postal changes, was not easily accessible. This information, he be-

<sup>1</sup> This is especially true of the *Tenth Report* just issued, which is even more original and suggestive than its predecessors.

lieved, could be given without any inconvenience, whilst many misapprehensions, and possibly complaints, might be avoided. The public might thus see what the Post-office was about ; learn their duty towards the Department, and find out—what half the people did not then and perhaps do not even yet understand—what were the benefits and privileges to which they were justly entitled at its hands.

The Duke of Argyll succeeded Lord Canning in the management of the Post-office in 1855, and his years of office are distinguished by many most important improvements and reforms. One important change consisted in the amalgamation of the two corps of London letter-carriers, effected soon after the installation of the Duke of Argyll at the Post-office. The two classes of "General Post" and "London District" letter-carriers were perhaps best known before 1855, by the former wearing a red, and the latter a blue, uniform. The object of this amalgamation, for which Mr. Hill had been sedulously striving from the period of penny postage, was to avoid the waste of time, trouble, and expense consequent on two different men going over the same ground to distribute two classes of letters which might, without any real difficulty, be delivered together. The greatest objection in the Post-office itself to completing the change, arose from the different *status* of the two bodies of men, the one class being paid at a much higher rate of wages and with better prospects than the other class. This difficulty was at length surmounted, when the benefits of this minor reform became clearly apparent in earlier and more regular deliveries of letters. Inside the Post-office the work was made much more easy and simple, and the gross inequality existing between two bodies of public servants whose duties were almost identical, was done away.<sup>1</sup>

Still more important was the division of London into ten postal districts, carried out during the year 1856. The immense magnitude of the metropolis necessitated this scheme ; it having been found impossible to overcome the obstacles to a more speedy transmission of letters within and around London, or properly to manage, without some change, the ever-increasing amount of Post-office business. Under the new arrangements,

<sup>1</sup> Postmaster-General's *First Report*, p. 35.

each district was to be treated in many respects as a separate town, district post-offices to be erected in each of them. Thus, instead of all district post-letters being carried from the receiving houses to the chief office at St. Martin's-le-Grand, there to be sorted and re-distributed, the letters must now be sent to the principal office of the district in which they were posted ; sorted there ; and distributed from that office according to their address. The time and trouble saved by this arrangement is, as was expected, enormous. Under the old system, a letter from Cavendish Square to Grosvenor Square went to the General Post-office, was sorted, and then sent back to the latter place, travelling a distance of four or five miles : whereas, at present, with hourly deliveries, it is almost immediately sent from one place to the other.<sup>1</sup> An important part of the new scheme was, that London should be considered in the principal provincial post-offices as ten different towns, each with its own centre of operations, and that the letters should be assorted and despatched on this principle. Country letters would be delivered straight-way—without any intermediate sorting—to that particular part of London for which they were destined ; whilst the sorters there having the necessary local knowledge, would distribute them immediately into the postmen's walks. With respect to the *smaller* provincial towns, it was provided that their London correspondence should be sorted into districts on the railway during the journey to the metropolis. Thus, on the arrival of the different mails at the several railway termini, the letters would not be sent as formerly to the General Post-office, but direct to each district office, in bags prepared in the course of the journey. It was a long time before this new and important plan was thoroughly carried out in all its details ; but now that it is in working order, the result is very marked in the earlier delivery of letters, and in the time and labour saved in the various processes. In fact, all the anticipated benefits have flowed from the adoption of the measure.

In the same year a reduction was made in the rates for book-packets. The arrangement made at this time, which exists at

<sup>1</sup> So late as the year 1842, a letter posted at any London receiving-house after *two* in the afternoon was not delivered at Islington until the next morning.—Postmaster-General's *Second Report*.

present, charges one penny for every four ounces of printed matter; a book weighing one pound being charged fourpence. A condition annexed was, that every such packet should be open at the ends or sides, and if closed against inspection, should be liable to be charged at the unpaid letter rate of postage. This penalty was soon found to be unreasonably heavy and vexatious, and was therefore reduced to an additional charge of sixpence only. At the present time, the conditions under which such packets may be sent through the post are the same, but the fines inflicted for infringements are still further reduced.

In 1857 a new regulation provided that a book-packet might consist of any number of sheets, which might be either printed or written, provided there was nothing in it of the nature of a letter. If anything of the sort should be found in the packet on examination, it was to be taken out and forwarded separately as a letter, and charged twopence as a fine in addition to the postage at the letter rate. The packet might consist of books, manuscripts, maps, prints with rollers, or any literary or artistic matter, if not more than two feet wide, long, or deep.

In the same year, the letter-rate to all the British Colonies (which were not previously under the lower rates) was reduced to the uniform one of sixpence for each half-ounce, payable in advance. The privileges of the English book-post were also extended to the Colonies; the rate at which books, &c. might be sent being threepence for every four ounces. Exceptions were made in respect to the following places, viz.—Ascension Island, East Indies, Hong Kong, Australia, New Zealand, and the Gold Coast, to which places the rate charged was fourpence for four ounces, the weight being restricted to three pounds.

Another important improvement was made when, about the same time, the postage on letters conveyed by private ship between this country and all parts of the world, was reduced to a uniform rate of sixpence the half-ounce.

Nor were these reforms the only results of the wise rule of the Duke of Argyll. Through his exertions, a postal convention was concluded with France, resulting not only in a considerable reduction of postage on letters passing between the two countries, but in the lowering of the rate to all European countries, letters

for which *went by way of France*. An attempt was made to arrange a postal convention with the United States during the year 1857, but like so many previous ones, it came to nothing.

The Duke of Argyll is also favourably remembered in the metropolitan offices, for having granted—to the major establishment at any rate—the boon of a Saturday half-holiday.

But perhaps his Grace laboured most arduously to bring about a more satisfactory relation between the railway companies and the Post-office. Since the advent of cheap postage, nothing had so much impeded the progressive development of the Post-office, as the adverse attitude of the companies who must convey the mails, now that all other modes of conveyance had been virtually superseded by the power of steam. Although the Postmaster-General failed in this instance, he is none the less entitled to the gratitude of the country for his well-meant attempt to repair the mistake which the Executive originally made in not carefully providing for the public service. Few could say that the existing law was, and is, not defective. The gain to the Post-office through railways is certainly enormous: besides the advantages of increased speed, they make it possible to get through the sorting and the carrying of the mails at the same time. But here the gain ends; and, as we have previously said, the cost of the service really done is heavy beyond all proportion. The cost of carrying mails by coaches averaged twopence farthing a mile; the average cost under railways (now that so many companies take bags by all trains) for 1864, averages sixpence a mile, some railways charging nearly five shillings a mile for the service they render. The cost of running a train may be reckoned in most cases from a shilling to fifteen pence per mile; and thus the Post-office, for the use of a fraction of a train, may be said constantly to be paying at the rate of from fifty to two hundred and fifty per cent. in excess of the whole cost of running! The Postmaster-General stated that the terms under which one railway company would undertake postal service was totally disproportionate to those of a neighbouring company. On the other hand, all the companies were alike dissatisfied, however dissimilar the contracts, or the terms imposed and agreed to.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, it was declared next to impossible to

<sup>1</sup> See address by the late Mr. Robert Stephenson on his election to the

secure regularity and punctuality in the conveyance of mails, and to agree to amicable arbitration for the service done, until the Legislature should lay down reasonable laws, binding all the companies alike. A Bill was introduced into the House of Lords regulating the arrangements between the Post-office and the different companies. Though it was carefully prepared, it was strongly opposed by the railway interest in Parliament. The opposition was all the more unreasonable, inasmuch as many of its clauses had been inserted, as it were, at the instance of the railway companies themselves. As far as the Post-office was concerned, it seems to have been the extent of the wish of the authorities that the question of remuneration might be based on the actual cost of running the trains, making due allowance, on the one hand, for the benefits accruing to the companies from their connexion with the mail service, and adding, on the other hand, compensation for any special extra expenses to which the companies might be subjected by the requirements of that service, *together with a full allowance for profit*.<sup>1</sup> The Bill also provided for the more extensive employment of ordinary

Presidency of the Institution of Civil Engineers in 1855, given in the appendix to the larger edition of Mr. Smiles' *Life of George Stephenson*. Mr. Edward Page, the present able Inspector-General of Mails, replied to his address in a lucid and lengthy report, to be found in the Postmaster-General's *Second Report*, pp. 44—55. Upon this, Mr. Stephenson published a second *Address* on the subject, which according to Sir Morton Peto, "quite snuffed out" the Post-office authorities. This second *Address* was not replied to we should think—for we do not happen to have any exact official information on the subject—because, firstly, many parts of it were most evidently based on a misconception of the motive which induced the Post-office to notice at all the first address, which was *not* "to depreciate the advantages afforded to the Post-office by railways," as Mr. Stephenson alleged, but only to controvert his statements attaching to railways what was thought an *undue value* in regard to postal facilities,—was *not* meant to prove that "for the purposes of the Post-office, we had better have been without railways," or that mail coaches could have worked at less expense in opposition to railways, for both propositions would be manifestly absurd. The advantages accruing to the Post-office from railways are fully admitted on page 55 of the Post-office Report. And secondly, because Mr. Stephenson omitted to refer in his second address to many most important considerations which Mr. Page adduced. "If the Government and the Railway Companies," concluded Mr. Stephenson, "went hand in hand, arrangements might be made by which the whole correspondence of the nation might be carried on, in a much more perfect manner with advantage to the Companies, and without any direct payment by the Government," p. 32. What would this self-denying ordinance have been? How curious that the matter ended here!

<sup>1</sup> Appendix to Postmaster-General's *Second Report*, p. 51.

passenger trains,—not, however, to the supercession of the regular mail-trains,—for the *exclusive* employment of certain trains for postal purposes, for penalties, &c. The measure had been brought in late in the session, and was eventually withdrawn. The Bill itself, with its twenty-one clauses, forms part of the Appendix to the Postmaster-General's fourth report; and as the basis of arrangements between the two interests is still unsettled and uncertain, the Duke of Argyll there commends it to the careful attention of the public, as well as to the fair consideration of the railway authorities themselves.

In 1858, on the accession of Lord Derby to power, Lord Colchester was appointed to the Post-office without a seat in the Cabinet. Improvements continued during his short administration, both as regards inland, foreign, and colonial postages; but nothing calls for special mention here except an attempt on the part of the Post-office to render the payment of inland letters compulsory. The plan cannot be said to have had a fair trial. Its benefits and advantages were not clearly apparent, except to those who were acquainted with the machinery of the Post-office. While, without doubt, the principles upon which it was based were sound, the objections to the arrangement lay on the surface, and were such as could not be overcome except by the exercise of great patience on the part of the public: the measure pressed heavily on certain interests: a great portion of the less thoughtful organs of the public press manifested considerable repugnance to it, and, in consequence, the Postmaster-General was led to recommend to the Treasury the withdrawal of the order after the expiration of a few weeks of partial trial. As pointed out by Mr. Hill at the time, compulsory prepayment of letters was a part of the original plan of penny postage; it was one of the recommendations which he made, having for their object the simplification of accounts, and the more speedy delivery of letters. The Secretary of the Post-office in urging a fair trial of the measure,<sup>1</sup> argued that after the lapse of a few months it would be productive of good even to letter-writers, not to speak of the saving of time, trouble, and expense to the Department. He added that there were no difficulties attributable to the new rule which might not be surmounted by

<sup>1</sup> *Fifth Report*, Appendix, pp. 43—48.



a little care or ingenuity.<sup>1</sup> As it was, the public preferred an immediate termination of the experiment to the possible and problematical advantages that might arise from its continuance ; and in this instance the country was indulged by an early return to the old plan.

In the following year, Lord Colchester was succeeded by the late Earl of Elgin as Postmaster-General, with a seat in Lord Palmerston's Cabinet. When Lord Elgin was sent on the special mission to the East in 1860, the Duke of Argyll held the joint offices of Lord Privy Seal and Postmaster-General until a permanent successor was appointed in the person of Lord Stanley of Alderley, who still ably fills the office.

In 1859, the Money-order Office in London, and the money-order system generally, were remodelled. By a process meant to simplify the accounts, and other judicious alterations, a saving of 4,000*l.* a year was effected, while the public were benefited by some concessions that had been much desired, such as the granting of money-orders up to the amount of 10*l.* instead of 5*l.* The money-order system was likewise extended to the colonies, the first connexion of the kind having been opened with Canada and our European possessions of Gibraltar and Malta. It has subsequently been extended to the principal British colonies, including the whole of Australia.

Important improvements were also made in the department charged with the transmission of mails. Several accelerations—in one case a most important one—were made in the speed of the principal mail-trains ; the number of travelling post-offices was increased ; the construction of the whole of them was improved ; and the apparatus-machinery, attached to the carriages for the exchange of mail-bags at those stations where the mail-trains do not stop, was called more and more into requisition.

Under the Earl of Elgin, the British Post-office endeavoured to form conventions with foreign countries, the object in all cases being the increase of postal facilities. In the case of Spain and Portugal, the authorities seem to have been suc-

<sup>1</sup> A gentleman connected with a Manchester banking company writes to us to dispute, with great show of reason, the position here taken up. We are free to admit, from one or two instances which he gives, that the rule operated exceedingly ill to his business. No measure, however, should be judged by singular and exceptional occurrences.

cessful, and partially so with the German Postal Union. An attempt to renew negotiations with the United States calls for mention here. The advocates of ocean penny postage (of which so much was heard some years previously—not only a desirable, but a practicable scheme) may thus obtain some idea of the difficulty of coming to any reasonable arrangement between the two countries. We have already stated that a former Postmaster-General urged upon the Government of the United States the necessity of reduction in the rates of postage of letters circulating from one country to the other, but was unsuccessful at the time.<sup>1</sup> In 1859, the Postmaster-General of the United States (Mr. Holt) communicated to the English Department his concurrence in the principle of a reduction in the postage of British letters from twenty-four to twelve cents, providing that England would give America the lion's share of the proposed postage! The United States' Government would agree to the change provided the new rate be apportioned as follows, viz.—

United States' Inland Postage . . . . .	3 cents.
Sea Rate of Postage . . . . .	7 „
British Inland Postage . . . . .	2 „

The Earl of Elgin objected to this proposal as not equitable. He argued, with perfect truth and fairness, that each country ought to be remunerated according to the value of the service it rendered, and that, whether the inland service was considered (where the three items of collection, conveyance,<sup>2</sup> and delivery must be taken into account), or the sea service (undoubtedly better worked and regulated with us than in America), this country had a fair claim to a larger share of postage than the

<sup>1</sup> During the progress of one of these negotiations the following memorandum, written by Mr. Bancroft, American Minister, is so characteristic of his people that we are tempted to amuse our readers with its reproduction entire. —Postmaster-General's *First Report*, Appendix, p. 83. "Approved as far as 'the rate for sea.' What follows is superfluous and objectionable. Make your rates (England) to your colonies and possessions, and foreign countries, what you please, high or low, one sea-rate or a dozen, or none at all; one inland rate or a dozen, or none at all. What your people pay we are willing to pay, but not more, and *vice versa*. Our security is, that we pay what your people pay from the same place for the same benefit, and *vice versa*."

<sup>2</sup> In America letters are certainly carried much greater distances, at the uniform charge of three cents, than with us for a penny; but it must be borne in mind that there are no official deliveries of letters in the United States.

United States. As, however, an unrestricted intercourse between the two countries was far more important than a nice adjustment in the division of the postage, the English Postmaster-General would only press for equality, and proposed the following :—

British Inland Postage . . . . .	1 <i>d.</i> or 2 cents.
Sea Postage . . . . .	4 <i>d.</i> „ 8 „
United States' Inland Postage . . . . .	1 <i>d.</i> „ 2 „
	<hr/>
	6 <i>d.</i> 12
	<hr/>

In the event of the American Government not being prepared to agree, Lord Elgin proposed that a disinterested third party should be called in, to whom the whole matter might be amicably referred. To this communication no answer whatever was returned, and the English Department had to wait until the next report of the United States' Post-office was published, in order to ascertain how the proposals had been received. It was found that Mr. Holt there complained that a reasonable offer that he had made to England had been declined there, "*and for reasons so unsatisfactory*, that for the present no disposition is felt to pursue the matter further." It is sincerely to be regretted that this great improvement, which would have been gladly hailed by thousands on both sides of the Atlantic, should have been so arrested, and especially that the United States' Government should have been deaf to the proposition to send the matter to arbitrament. Unquestionably, the present results, as well as the responsibility of future exertion, lies at the door of the United States ; and it is to be hoped that, in justice to the thousands whom the Americans have eagerly invited to populate their country—not to mention other considerations—they will soon renew their efforts to obtain the boon of a sixpenny postage, and be prepared to meet the mother-country on reasonable grounds.

The postal service with Ireland being considered deficient, so much so, that frequent mention was made of the subject in the House of Commons, a new and special service was brought into operation on the 1st of October, 1860. Night and day mail-trains have, on and from that date, been run specially from

Euston Square Station to Holyhead, and special mail steamers employed, at enormous expense, to cross the Channel. Letter-sorting is carried on not only in the trains, but on board the packets; nearly all the Post-office work, including the preparation of the letters for immediate delivery at London and Dublin respectively, being accomplished on the journey between London and Dublin, and *vice versa*—a journey which is now accomplished in about twelve hours. By means of this new service, a great saving of time is also effected on the arrival and departure of most of the American and Canadian mails. It cannot but be interesting to the reader who may have followed us as we have endeavoured to trace the progress of post communication in this country, to know how much is really possible under the improved facilities of our own day. A better instance could not be afforded than that occurring in the year 1862, when the important news on which depended peace or war was hourly expected from the United States. Before the packet was due, the present indefatigable Inspector-General of Mails took steps to expedite the new Irish mail service, to the greatest possible extent, in its passage from Queenstown to London, and the result is so clearly and accurately given in the *Times* of the 8th of January, 1862, that we cannot do better than quote the account entire:—

“The arrangements for expressing the American mails throughout from Queenstown to London, which we described as being so successfully executed with the mails brought by the *Africa* last week, have been repeated with still more satisfactory results in the case of the mails brought by the *Europa*. These results are so exceptional that we record them in detail. The *Europa* arrived off Queenstown, about five miles from the pier, at 9 P.M. on Monday night. Her mails and the despatches from Lord Lyons were placed on board the small tender in waiting, and arrived at the Queenstown pier at 10.5 P.M. at which point they were transferred to an express steamboat for conveyance by river to Cork. Leaving Queenstown pier at 10.10 P.M. they arrived alongside the quay at Cork at 11.15 P.M. and thirteen minutes afterwards the special train left the Cork station for Dublin, accomplishing the journey to Dublin (166 miles) in four hours and three minutes, *i.e.* at a speed of about 41 miles an hour, including stoppages. The transmission through the streets

between the railway termini in Dublin and by special train to Kingstown occupied only thirty-six minutes, and in four minutes more the special mail-boat *Ulster* was on her way to Holyhead. The distance across the Irish Channel, about sixty-six statute miles, was performed by the *Ulster*, against a contrary tide and heavy sea, in three hours and forty-seven minutes, giving a speed of about seventeen and a half miles an hour. The special train, which had been in waiting for about forty-eight hours, left the Holyhead Station at 8.13 A.M. and it was from this point that the most remarkable part of this rapid express commenced. The run from Holyhead to Stafford,  $130\frac{1}{2}$  miles, occupied only 145 minutes, being at the rate of no less than fifty-four miles an hour; and although so high a speed was judiciously not attempted over the more crowded portion of the line from Stafford to London, the whole distance from Holyhead to Euston, 264 miles, was performed by the London and North-Western Company in exactly five hours, or at a speed of about  $52\frac{2}{3}$  miles an hour, a speed unparalleled over so long a line, crowded with ordinary traffic. The entire distance from Queenstown pier to Euston Square, about 515 miles, was thus traversed in fifteen hours and three minutes, or at an average speed of about thirty-four and a quarter miles an hour, including all delays necessary for the several transfers of the mails from boat to railway, or *vice versa*. . . . By means of the invention for supplying the tender with water from a trough *in transitu*, the engine was enabled to run its first stage of  $130\frac{1}{2}$  miles, from Holyhead to Stafford, without stopping."

During the session of 1860-1, an Act was passed through Parliament for the establishment of Post-Office Savings' Banks on a plan originally proposed by Mr Sykes, of Huddersfield.

In order to encourage the registration of letters containing coin or valuable articles, the registration fee was reduced, in 1862, from 6*d.* to 4*d.* each letter. At the same time, the plan of compulsory registration of letters was revived, and applied to all letters passing through the *London Office* which contained, or were supposed to contain, coin. In 1863, the plan was found to have been so successful in its results, that it was extended to *all inland letters*. The public may judge of the benefits and blessings of this proscriptive measure—to the officers of the Post-

office at any rate—when we state that the convictions for letter-stealing, since the plan was fully adopted, have been reduced more than ninety per cent.<sup>1</sup>

In 1862, the Pneumatic Conveyance Company set up a branch of their operations at the Euston Square Station, London. The Post-office took advantage of this new mode of conveyance to send the mail-bags to the North-Western District Office from this important railway terminus. The work is, of course, accomplished with marvellous expedition. The machinery for other localities is in course of construction, and may ultimately extend all over the metropolis, to the supercession, as far as the Post-office is concerned, of the existing mail-vans.

During the month of May, 1863, a Postal Congress—the first of the kind—originated, we believe, by Mr. Rasson of the United States, assembled at the *Bureau des Postes*, in the Rue Jean Jacques, Paris, under the presidency of the French Postmaster-General, M. Vandal. The object of the Congress was “the improvement of postal communication between the principal commercial nations of the world.” As we find that the little republic of Ecuador was represented, the postal affairs of *little* kingdoms were also not overlooked. Each civilized nation was asked to send a delegate, and all the most important States responded. Mr. Frederic Hill, brother of Sir Rowland Hill, and Assistant Secretary, was the English representative; the President represented France; M. Metzler, Prussia, Mr. Rasson, the United States; M. Hencke, Hamburg, &c. &c. The prepayment of foreign letters was one of the most difficult subjects discussed. The Congress came to the conclusion that it would be best to leave it optional with the writer of the letter whether the postage should be paid to its destination, or paid on receipt; in the latter case, however, it was thought desirable that a moderate additional postage should be charged. Another

<sup>1</sup> The number of applications for missing letters containing coin has fallen from about 6,000 to 2,000 a year. The thieves, however, have taken to letters in which stamps are enclosed, and the number of complaints are on the increase. Postage stamps should not be sent in larger quantities than four or five shillings' worth, and even these should be enclosed in strong envelopes. The Post-office authorities are trying many expedients to remedy this state of things. The principle of *restrictive* sorting, by which arrangements the letters in the largest towns go through fewer and well-defined hands is being fully carried out, with important results, throughout the country.

important matter was settled in a conclusive manner. It was first decided that the postage of foreign letters should be regulated by weight ; it then became highly necessary, in order to the carrying out of this decision, that the postage should be calculated by a common standard ; hence the following resolution, which was agreed to—"The metrical decimal system, being of all systems of weighing that which is best suited to the requirements of the postal service, it is expedient to adopt it for the international postal relations, to the exclusion of every other system." Other subjects of lesser importance, such as the route of foreign letters, the division of postage rates, the transmission of coin in letters (which they agreed to allow), were discussed very fully and, we are assured, very amicably. The Congress seems to have arrived at a good understanding of the principles of postal reciprocity, and good may, in time, be the result. The Postal Congress of last year was a Peace Congress of the most efficient kind, and in every sense of the term.

Within the last ten years the facilities offered to letter-writers by the Post-office have materially increased. Four thousand additional persons have had to be employed in the service, one half, at least, of whom are engaged on account of the facilities and improvements in question, whilst the remainder may be said to have been required by the gradual increase of work in the Establishment. The establishment of mid-day mails, increasing the number of daily deliveries in almost every provincial town ; the acceleration of night-mails, allowing more time for posting in some places, and earlier deliveries in all ; the increase in the number of village posts, to the extent of between three and four hundred every year ; the gradual extension of free deliveries ; the establishment of pillar letter-boxes as receptacles for letters ; reductions in the rate of foreign and colonial letters, and also in the registration fee for home letters ; the division of London, and to some extent other large towns, like Liverpool, into districts ; and above all, the establishment of thousands of new savings' banks on safe principles, in connexion with improved money-order offices ; are some of the principal facilities to which we refer. The past ten years have been years of great, gradual, and unexampled improvement. Nor is there anything but progress and advancement in prospect. Never at any time

in its history were the authorities more alive to the fact that the Post-office is an institution capable of infinite extension and growth, or seem more determined to make it in every respect subserve the best interests of the State. Further, they clearly understand that it belongs to the nation, and that the public have a right to expect the development of the utmost of its utilities. The institution of the Post-office Savings' Banks fully show that the Government and the Post-office authorities are ready to make the most of available resources, thinking little of the fact of their having been originally provided for different purposes, if only they can be made to fit in without impairing the efficiency of the machinery for its principal business. This is so, with regard to the two more recent changes and proposals of 1864. The first is the important Act passed in the last session of Parliament relating to Government Annuities and small Life Insurances, of which we shall speak at greater length in the second section of this volume. This Bill—which has been prepared by the same able and indefatigable officers who organized the present system of Post-office Savings' Banks, namely, Mr. Scudamore, the Assistant-Secretary of the Post-office, and Mr. Chetwynd, the present Receiver and Accountant-General—provides for the Post-office machinery being made available for the new operations. The second measure is the alteration recently made known in the sample and packet post, so as to make it generally acceptable to the mercantile world. This alteration, which not only consists in a reduction of the rates, but in the inclusion of hitherto prohibited articles, can scarcely fail to make the Post-office of still greater utility to the great trading and commercial classes. There are still very strict rules to be attended to, but the exercise of the most ordinary prudence will suffice to protect the public against the infliction of the necessary pains and penalties. It will be observed that in the "sample post" the samples have really to be such as the name implies; no article can be sent which would make the Post-office common carriers, conveying parcels bought and sold in the ordinary way of trade. Why this should be so, is not clear, except that this post may be looked upon as a preliminary step in the direction of one for small parcels—a scheme of Sir Rowland Hill's, which he has left to be carried out by his



successors. We feel convinced, if under proper regulations as to the character of the goods and the size of the parcels, a parcels' post would be an unspeakable boon, and a scheme to which, we submit, there are no insuperable obstacles. While railway companies might still keep this traffic between the largest towns, the Post-office would have no competitors for that between outlying and rural districts.

## PART II.

# INDUSTRIAL ACCOUNT OF THE POST-OFFICE.

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"It has often struck me that some pains should be taken to make the main features of the Post-office system intelligible to the people."—*Speech of Sir Rowland Hill at Liverpool*, 1847.

"It may not be too much to say that half the people in this country who use the Post-office do not know clearly all the benefit they may derive from it."—*Household Words*, 1856.



## PREFATORY.

It is scarcely possible to over-estimate the importance of the postal regulations of this country. Every section of society, and, to some extent, every individual, participates in the benefits—commercial, social, and moral—bestowed by our cheap Post-office. It is not our purpose here to urge the value and utility of the Post-office institution—which most of our readers gratefully admit—but rather to furnish some general information relative to the organization and ordinary working of the Department, sensible that an intelligible account of the principal features in the system will increase the interest already felt in the Post-office, as a mighty engine spreading the influences of commerce, education, and religion throughout the world. The Postmaster-General for 1854, in starting an annual report of the Post-office, stated that “many misapprehensions and complaints arise from an imperfect knowledge of matters which might, without any inconvenience, be placed before the public;” and also, “that the publicity thus given will be an advantage to the Department itself, and will have a good effect upon the working of many of its branches.”

Endeavouring to exclude all matter that is purely technical, and presenting the reader with no more statistical information than is necessary to a proper understanding of the subject, and only premising that this information—for the correctness of which we are alone responsible—has been carefully collated from a mass of official documents not easily accessible, and others presented to the public from time to time, we will first describe—

## CHAPTER I.

## THE ORGANIZATION OF THE POST-OFFICE.

THE Post-office being a branch of the public service, instituted by statute, is, of course, under the control of the Government of the country in every respect. The principal Acts of Parliament which now regulate the Post-office are those of 1 Vict. c. 32—36, entitled "An Act to repeal the several laws relating to the Post-office;" "An Act for the management of the Post-office;" "An Act for consolidating the laws relative to offences against the Post-office;" one to which we have previously referred, 2 Vict. c. 98, "An Act to provide for the conveyance of mails by railway;" 3 & 4 Vict. c. 96, "An Act for the regulation of the duties of Postage." Besides these more important Acts, there are others of later date relating to the Money-order Office, colonial posts, and, more recently, relating to the Post-office Savings' Banks, and Government Insurances and Annuities.

According to the latest returns,<sup>1</sup> there are 11,316 post-offices in the United Kingdom, of which 808 are head-offices, and 10,508 sub-offices. To these must be added a great number of road letter-boxes, making a total of 15,202 public receptacles for letters, or more by 10,000 than the total number before penny postage. The total number of letters passing through the Post-office during the year 1863 was 642,000,000, or, in the proportion of letters to population, no less than 22 to each person in the three kingdoms. As contrasted with the last year of dear postage, the number of letters show an eight-fold increase.

The gross revenue of the Post-office for the year 1863, was 3,874,299*l.*, being more by nearly a quarter of a million sterling than the proceeds for the year 1862. To this sum should be added a further item of 125,156*l.* for the impressed stamp on

<sup>1</sup> Postmaster-General's *Reports*, 1863, 1864, and *Revenue Estimates* for 1864-5, from which the whole of our statistics are derived.

newspapers sent through the post, the charges for which are collected by the Commissioners for Inland Revenue. The entire expenses of the Department, including the expenses of mail-packets (which are now all charged against the Post-office, the management of them having been recently transferred from the Board of Admiralty), amounted to 2,956,486*l.* The net revenue for the year was accordingly 1,042,969*l.* It ought here to be added, in order that a fair and clear estimate may be formed of the financial success of penny postage, that the item of charges of the mail-packets did not appear against the Post-office in the accounts prior to 1837, and that if they had still been made out in the same manner something like 800,000*l.* would be added to the available net revenue of the establishment.<sup>1</sup>

At the end of 1864, the staff of officers employed in the British Post-office numbered 25,697. Of this number 25,601 were engaged in the British Isles, 74 in foreign countries, and 22 in the Colonies.<sup>2</sup> Of the *employés* at home, between 3,000 and 4,000 are attached to the London office alone, while the remainder, including more than 11,000 postmasters, belong to the establishments in the various towns and villages of the United Kingdom. All this large body of officers is under the immediate control of the Postmaster-General and the General Secretaries in London. The service of the three kingdoms, notwithstanding this direct control over the whole, is managed in the respective capitals, at each of which there is a chief office, with a secretarial and other departmental staffs.

*The Postmaster-General*, the highest controlling authority at the Post-office, representing the Executive Government, is now always a peer of the realm,<sup>3</sup> a member of the Privy Council,

<sup>1</sup> The gross revenue for 1864 is stated at 4,100,000*l.*, an increase of nearly 300,000*l.* on the previous year as above given.

<sup>2</sup> The colonial Post-offices are not now under the rule of the English Postmaster-General. All appointments to these offices are now made by the Colonial-Secretary if the salary is over 200*l.*; if under that sum, by the Governors of the different colonies.

<sup>3</sup> On the 28th March last the question was raised in the House of Commons as to the state of the law regulating the appointment of Postmaster-General. This work was then referred to as having laid it down that the Postmaster-General must always be a peer, though, it was added, we had assigned no authority for such an arrangement. It will be observed that what we ventured upon saying was simply that *it is now always so*. We knew of no law by which peers were appointed to the exclusion of commoners; nay, the

and generally, though not necessarily, a Cabinet Minister. Of course he changes with the Government. As we have seen in the origin of the office, he holds his appointment by patent granted under the Great Seal. The Postmaster-General has in his gift all the postmasterships in England and Wales, where the salary is not less than 120*l.* per annum (all under that sum being in the gift of the Treasury Lords), and to those in Ireland and Scotland, where the salary is 100*l.* and upwards. Besides this patronage, now dispensed to officers already in the service, he has the power of nomination to all vacancies in the General Post-offices of London, Edinburgh, and Dublin, and the appointment to all vacancies in staff appointments connected with the three head offices. The following noblemen have occupied the position of Postmaster-General during the last forty years, or since the joint Postmaster-Generalship was abolished in 1823,<sup>1</sup>

case of Lord Frederick Montague, who was Postmaster-General in 1826 under Mr. Canning, and who was only the son of a peer, we knew of as a case in point, proving how the office might be filled up as the Prime Minister saw fit. We share the feeling of Mr. D. Griffith and many more who regard the Act of Queen Anne setting forth that no one appointed to a *new* office of profit henceforth from that date (1705) should be allowed to sit in the House of Commons, as an unwise and anomalous arrangement. Whether the "grant of Postmaster-General" should have come under the operation of this law is, besides, rather questionable. In 1710 the title of "Postmaster-General of England, Scotland, and Ireland,"—as we find it given in numerous documents before that period—was changed to "Postmaster-General of Great Britain," the same officers continuing to serve. In this instance, therefore, it was more the change of name of an old office than the creation of a new one. However it is, few will dispute that if this be the only reason why members of the Lower House are excluded from sharing with members of the House of Lords the responsibilities and emoluments of the office of Postmaster-General, there is every reason for the abrogation of the absurd law which stands in their way.

<sup>1</sup> The following list of Postmasters-General before this period, taken from a return made to the House of Commons, March 25, 1844, may not be uninteresting to some of our readers. After Sir Brian Tuke, the first "Master of the Postes," we find his successors to have been Sir William Paget, one of Henry VIII.'s Chief Secretaries of State, and John Mason, Esq. "Secretary for the French Tongue." "The fees or wages" of each of these functionaries are given at 66*l.* 1*s.* 6*d.* a year. The reader will be familiar with the Postmasters-General under Elizabeth, James I. Charles I. and the Commonwealth. Coming to the reign of Charles II. we find Philip Froude, Esq. acting for the Duke of York from 1678 to 1688.

#### WILLIAM AND MARY.

Sir John Wildman	1688—1690
Sir Robert Cotton; Thomas Frankland, Esq.	1690—1708

#### QUEEN ANNE.

Sir Thomas Frankland; Sir John Evelyn	1708—1715
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viz. Earl of Chichester (1823), Lord Frederick Montague (1826), Duke of Manchester (1837), Duke of Richmond (1830), appointed Postmaster-General of Great Britain and Ireland the year after; Marquis of Conyngham (July, 1834), Lord Maryborough (Dec. 1834), Marquis of Conyngham again (May 1835), Earl of Lichfield (June 1835), Viscount Lowther (Sept. 1841), Earl St. Germain (June 1846), Marquis of Clanricarde (July 1846). Still more recently, and in the memory of most of our readers, there have been in the office the Earl of Hardwicke, Viscount Canning, the Duke of Argyll (twice), Lord Colchester, the Earl of Elgin, and, as now, Lord Stanley of Alderley.

*The Secretary of the Post-office* holds the highest fixed appointment in the Establishment, and may be regarded, therefore, as the responsible adviser of the Postmaster-General. The principal secretaries during the century have been Francis Freeling, Esq.

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GEORGE I.

Lord Cornwallis; James Craggs, Esq. . . . .	1715—1720
Edward Carteret, Esq.; Galfridus Walpole . . . .	1720—1733

GEORGE II.

Edward Carteret, Esq.; Lord Thomas Lovel . . . .	1733—1739
Sir John Eyles; Lord Lovel . . . . .	1739—1744
Lord Lovel alone (now Earl of Leicester) . . . .	1744—1759
Earl of Besborough . . . . .	1759

GEORGE III.

Earl of Egmont; Hon. R. Hampden . . . . .	1762
Lord Hyde; Hon. R. Hampden . . . . .	1763
Earl of Besborough; Lord Grantham . . . . .	1765
Earl of Sandwich; Lord de Spencer . . . . .	1768
Viscount Barrington; Hon. Henry Carteret . . . .	1782
Earl of Tankerville; Hon. H. Carteret . . . . .	1784
Lord Carteret; Lord Walsingham . . . . .	1787
Lord Walsingham; Earl of Westmoreland . . . .	1789
Lord Walsingham; Earl of Chesterfield . . . . .	1790
Earl of Chesterfield; Earl of Leicester . . . . .	1794
Earl of Leicester; Lord Auckland . . . . .	1798
Lord Auckland; Lord Gower . . . . .	1799
Lord Auckland; Lord C. Spencer . . . . .	1801
Lord Spencer; Duke of Montrose . . . . .	1804
Earl of Buckinghamshire; Earl of Carysfort . . .	1806
Earl of Sandwich; Earl of Chichester . . . . .	1807
Earl of Chichester . . . . .	1814
Earl of Chichester; Earl of Clancarty . . . . .	1814
Earl of Chichester; Earl of Salisbury . . . . .	1816

When the Earl of Salisbury died in 1823 a successor was not appointed, the joint office being abolished principally through the exertions of the late Marquis of Normanby.



(1797), created a baronet in 1828;<sup>1</sup> Lieut.-Colonel William Leader Maberly (1836); Rowland Hill, Esq. (1856), a kind of joint secretary with Colonel Maberly since 1847, knighted in 1860; and, now, John Tilley, Esq. a highly esteemed and able public servant, who had previously filled the office of Assistant-Secretary. There are also now two Assistant-Secretaries, Frederic Hill, Esq. and Frank Ives Scudamore, Esq.

The chief office in London is divided into six principal departments, each under the charge of a chief officer. These heads of departments are severally responsible to the Postmaster-General for the efficiency of their respective branches, including the discipline of all their officers. Something like the same arrangement, though on a much smaller scale, is preserved in the less important chief offices of Dublin and Edinburgh. The branches in question consist of (1) the Secretary's Office; (2) the Solicitor's Office; (3) the Mail Office; (4) the Receiver and Accountant-General's Office; (5) the Money Order Office; and (6) the Circulation Office.

I. *The Secretary's Office* exercises a general supervising and controlling power over all the other departments of the Post-office, including of course, all provincial offices. It is the medium of communication with the Government through the Lords of the Treasury, and all correspondence with the public on any the arrangements of any of the branches is here carried on. In 1764 the Secretary of the Post-office had an assistant, one clerk, and two supernumerary clerks assigned to him. Now the three Secretaries are assisted in their duties by one chief clerk, one principal clerk for foreign and colonial business, fifteen senior clerks, and about sixty clerks in different classes. There is also a force of five official paper keepers, and nineteen messengers.

II. *The Solicitor's Office*, as its name implies, deals with the law business of the Post-office. It gives employment to a solicitor, an assistant solicitor, and four clerks.

III. *The Mail Office* is the department to which is entrusted the organization and supervision of the principal inland mail services of the kingdom. These services now consist almost

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Freeling had previously been Under-Secretary to Mr. Todd, who succeeded Mr. Shelvoeke as Secretary in 1762. The office of Secretary grew rapidly in importance after the appointment of Mr. Todd.

exclusively of those connected with the railway system, the mail coaches which used to be regulated and controlled in this branch having now, except on a few lines in Scotland and Ireland, ceased to exist. The staff of the Mail Office comprises an Inspector-General of Mails, a deputy Inspector-General, two principal clerks, and twenty-one clerks in three classes. The connexion between the Mail Office in London, and its important adjuncts, the travelling post-offices, which are all under its management, is kept up by a staff of five inspectors of mails (three employed in England, one in Ireland, and one in Scotland), a supervisor of mail-bag apparatus, and several subordinate inspecting officers. The Railway Post-office, or the "Travelling Branch," as it is now designated, employs a force of fifty-two clerks in three classes, and one hundred and thirty-nine sorters in three classes. That fine body of men, of whom we have already spoken, the race of old mail guards, has gradually diminished in number; the duties which they performed having to a great extent become merged in the duties of the travelling sorters. The entire number of mail guards in the United Kingdom, which before the introduction of railways was as many as 353, does not now exceed 86.

IV. *The Receiver and Accountant-General's Office* takes account of the money of each department, remittances being received here from all the other branches and each provincial town in England. Here general accounts of revenue and expenditure are kept, this office being charged with the examination of the postage and revenue accounts of each postmaster. All salaries, pensions, and items of current expenditure are also paid through this office. In 1764, these duties were performed by a Receiver-General assisted by four clerks. Afterwards a principal Accountant was appointed with a separate staff. The two offices were amalgamated some years ago. The present appointments comprise a receiver and accountant-general, a chief examiner, cashier, a principal book-keeper, with forty-eight clerks in three classes, and nine messengers.

V. *The Money-order Office*, occupying a separate building in Aldersgate Street, takes charge of the money-order business of the country in addition to doing a great amount of work as the principal money-order office for the metropolis. Of course,

everything relating to this particular branch of Post-office business, and also some part of the Savings' Bank accounts, pass through this channel. Each provincial postmaster sends a daily account of his money-order transactions to this office. Attached to the Money-order Office we find a controller, a chief clerk, an examiner, a bookkeeper, and 127 clerks in three classes, and 27 messengers.

VI. *The Circulation Office* in London manages the vast bulk of the ordinary postal work of the metropolis. In it, or from it, nearly all the letters, newspapers, and book-packets posted at, or arriving in London, are sorted, despatched, or delivered. Not only so, but in this branch nearly all the continental, and most part of the other foreign mails for the whole of the British islands, are received, sorted, and despatched. Most of the foreign mails are also made up in the foreign department of the Circulation Office. Under ordinary circumstances, moreover, British or inland letters for a great number of places are sent in transit through London, where it is requisite they should be re-arranged and forwarded. This daily herculean labour is performed by the clerks, sorters, and letter-carriers attached to this department. The ten district offices in London, engaged with the same kind of work on a small scale, are auxiliary and subordinate to the Circulation Office at the General Post-office. The principal branches into which the Circulation Office may be said to be divided, are—the Inland Office for the arrangement of letters going into, or coming from the provinces, the District Office for London letters, the Foreign Branch, the Registered Letter Branch, employing no less than fifty clerks, and the Returned Letter Branch about an equal number. The *major* branch of the Circulation Office comprises the controller, a vice-controller, 3 sub-controllers, 16 assistant controllers, and 252 clerks in three classes. The *minor* establishment, as it is called, employs no fewer than 2,398 persons. In this force are included 42 inspectors of letter-carriers in three classes ; the rest, being composed of sorters, stampers, letter-carriers, and messengers.

To these six principal departments may now be added that for the management of the Post-office Savings' Banks. Like the Money-order Office, it occupies a separate building, situated in St. Paul's Churchyard. The Savings' Bank department keeps a

personal account with every depositor. It acknowledges the receipt of every single deposit, and upon the requisite notice being furnished to the office, it sends out warrants authorizing postmasters to pay withdrawals. Each year the savings' bank book of each depositor is sent here for examination, and at the same time the interest accruing is calculated and allowed. The correspondence with postmasters and the public on any subject connected with the banks in question is managed entirely by this department. The already existing machinery of the Post-office has been freely called into operation, and the business of the postal banks has increased the work of at least three of the other branches. In the Receiver and Accountant-General's Office all the investments are received, and all remittances to postmasters for the repayment of deposits are made, while the surplus revenue goes from this office direct to that of the Commissioners for the Reduction of the National Debt. Again, the Money-order Office is required to undertake the examination of the general savings' bank accounts of each postmaster. At present, the staff of the Savings' Bank Office comprises a controller, an assistant controller, a principal clerk, forty-eight clerks in three classes, and six messengers. There are besides many "temporary" clerks.

The branches of minor importance<sup>1</sup> and the miscellaneous officers of the London establishment consist of a *Medical Department* with a medical officer, one assistant, and one messenger attached. There are, besides, distinct medical officers for each

<sup>1</sup> *The Post-office Library and Literary Association* almost deserves a place among the minor branches of the London establishment. This institution was formed in 1858, and is now very useful and flourishing. There had previously been a small library attached to one of the minor branches, but in the above year it was decided to establish one on a larger and broader basis, to include the higher officers and clerks in all the departments. After doing all they could themselves (and we miss no prominent official name among the very liberal donors of money and books on the occasion), the promoters appealed to the public and met with many cordial and handsome responses. The late Prince Consort sent the sum of 50*l.*, and the Postmaster-General (Lord Colchester) gave 25*l.* Many well-known names in the world of literature and many of the London publishers sent books. The newspaper agents, Messrs. Smith and Son, sent three hundred volumes with the message that "the Post-office does so much for us and does it so well, that we feel it a privilege to take part in this undertaking." This institution, of which Mr. Chetwynd is the obliging and valued Honorary Secretary, occupies two rooms, a library and reading room, in St. Martin's-le-Grand.

of the London districts. The amount required for this service for 1864-5, including medicine (given gratuitously to all officers who are not in receipt of 150*l.* yearly salary) is 1,722*l.* *A Housekeeper's Department*, including a housekeeper and sixteen female servants, requiring a yearly payment of 733*l.* Six engineers, ten constables, and six firemen, are also constantly employed and paid by the Post-office. When we add to this gigantic organization no less than 512 letter-receivers in London, who receive from 4*l.* to 90*l.* a year for partial services, the reader will have a tolerably correct idea of the establishment required to compass the amount of London postal business in the twenty-fifth year of penny postage.<sup>1</sup>

*The Surveyor's Department* is the connecting medium between the metropolitan offices and the post-offices in provincial towns. The postmasters of the latter are under the immediate supervision of the surveyor of the district in which the towns are situate, and it is to this superior officer that they are primarily responsible for the efficient working and discipline of their respective staff of officers. Among the many responsible duties of the surveyors, may be mentioned<sup>2</sup> those of visiting periodically each office in their district, to remedy, where they can, all defects in the working of the postal system; to remove, when possible, all just grounds of complaint on the part of the public; "to give to the correspondence of their district increased celerity, regularity, and security" when opportunity offers, and to arrange for contracts with these objects. The Act of Queen Anne provided for the appointment of one surveyor to the Post-office, whose duties it should be to make proper surveys of post-roads. Little more than a hundred years ago, one of these functionaries was sufficient to compass the duty of surveyor in England. There are now thirteen surveyors in the United Kingdom, nine of whom are located in England, two in Ireland, and two in Scotland. These principal officers are assisted in their duties by thirty-two "surveyors' clerks," arranged in two

<sup>1</sup> Large as this staff undoubtedly is, it would have been larger but for several timely changes in the modes of operation, principally in the system of keeping accounts. In 1855 the Civil Service Commissioners suggested various improvements in the organization of the Post-office, which resulted in a decrease of the officers attached to some of the branches.

<sup>2</sup> Postmaster-General's *Second Report*.

classes, and thirteen stationary clerks. To this staff must also be added thirty-three "clerks in charge," in two classes, who are under the direction of the surveyors, and whose principal duty consists in supplying temporarily the position of postmaster, in case of vacancies occurring through deaths, removals, &c.

There are, in all, 542 head provincial establishments in England and Wales, 141 in Ireland, and 115 in Scotland. They vary exceedingly, no two being exactly alike, but are settled in each town pretty much in proportion to the demands of the place, its size, trade, &c. Sometimes, however, the *position* of a town—the centre of a district, for instance—gives it more importance in an official sense than it would acquire from other and ordinary circumstances. The number of sub-offices attached to each town also varies greatly, according to the position of the head-office.<sup>1</sup> Next to the three chief offices, the largest establishments are those of Liverpool, Manchester, Glasgow, Birmingham, and Bristol. Among the most important offices of the second class, we may enumerate Aberdeen, Bath, Belfast, Cork, Exeter, Leeds, Hull, Newcastle-on-Tyne, Norwich, Sheffield, Southampton, and York. With respect to the rest, classification would be difficult; the postmasters receiving salaries ranging from 20*l.* to 400*l.* per annum, and varying from those where the whole of the duty of the office is performed by the postmaster himself, to others where he is assisted by a large staff of clerks and other auxiliaries.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Head-office* is the official term given to the independent post-towns, and such as are only subordinate to one of the three metropolitan offices. *Sub-offices* are, of course, under the head-offices. *Receiving-offices*, at which letters are received, but not delivered, are also under the authority of the head-office of the neighbourhood. Those post-offices at which money-orders are issued and paid are designated *Money-order Offices*, and include all the head-offices and a large number of sub-offices, and a few receiving-offices. *Packet-offices*, are those at which the regular mail-packets (ship-letters may be received or despatched at any port) are received and from which they are despatched. London and Southampton are packet offices for the Continental Mails, the East and West Indies, and South America. Liverpool and Queenstown take the United States and Canada. The mail-packets for the Cape of Good Hope and the West Coast of Africa sail to and from Devonport.

<sup>2</sup> The staff of the largest provincial offices usually consists of clerks, sorters, stampers, messengers, letter-carriers, and rural post-messengers. The *clerks* are now principally engaged on clerical duties, attending to the public on money-order business, &c. or in connexion with registered letters or unpaid-

Each head-postmaster is directly responsible for the full efficiency and proper management of his office. Under the approval of the district surveyor, the sanction of the Postmaster-General, and the favourable report of the Civil Service Commissioners, the postmaster is allowed to appoint nearly the whole of his own officers, he being responsible to the authorities for their proper discipline and good conduct. Formerly, and up to as late as eight years ago, each postmaster rendered an account of his transactions to the chief office quarterly. He now furnishes monthly accounts, weekly general accounts, and daily accounts of money-order business, besides keeping his books open to the inspection of the superior officers of the Post-office.<sup>1</sup>

letter accounts. In offices where the staff is smaller, the clerks also engage in sorting and despatching letters. In many small country towns females are employed as clerks. The *sorters* are principally engaged in sorting duties. *Stampers* and *messengers* do duties such as their designations denote. *Letter-carriers*—the familiar “postmen” of every household—are almost exclusively engaged in delivering letters, &c. from door to door. *Auxiliary letter-carriers* are those only partially so employed, principally on the largest, or early morning delivery. *Rural post-messengers* is the official name for “country post-men,” who make daily journeys among the villages and hamlets surrounding each town, delivering and taking up letters on their way.

<sup>1</sup> For fuller information on this head, see Appendix, to the Postmaster-General's *First Report*, pp. 71-4. The following forms part of a later document (*Ninth Report*, 1862-3), and is interesting enough to be quoted entire: “Owing to the successful measures which the Department has adopted by means of bonds, frequent supervision, and care in the selection of persons admitted into the service, and afterwards promoted therein, very few losses have occurred, of late years at least, through defalcation. More than twenty years ago, however, a postmaster who owed the office 2,000*l.*, but who had given security for only a part of that sum, absconded, leaving an unpaid debt of upwards of 1,000*l.* The recovery of the debt had long been considered hopeless, but a short time ago a letter was unexpectedly received from the postmaster's son enclosing a remittance in payment of part of his father's debt, and expressing a hope that after a time he should be able to pay the remainder—a hope which was soon realized, every farthing of the debt having now been discharged, in a manner most creditable to the gentleman concerned.”

## CHAPTER II.

## ON THE CIRCULATION OF LETTERS.

IN order to give our readers a proper idea of the channel through which their correspondence flows—the circulation of letters in the Post-office system—it will be necessary to devote a long chapter to the subject. We therefore propose to post an imaginary letter in the metropolis for a village in the far away North, following it from its place of posting till we finally see it deposited in the hands of the person to whom it is addressed. As in this way we hope to describe the different agencies employed to compass the postal work, we will begin with

## THE GENERAL POST-OFFICE.

The General Post-office, the great heart of the English postal system, is a fine building, of immense size and capability. Large as it was thought when originally constructed, many expedients have been resorted to to secure the requisite convenience for the performance of the ever-increasing work. Thus in 1831, an additional room was made by constructing, upon iron cantilevers, a gallery half-way between the floor and the roof of a part of the principal sorting hall. In 1836, the suite of rooms occupied by the secretary was taken for sorting operations, that functionary removing upstairs. A few years afterwards the Money-order Branch removed to a new building in Aldersgate Street. At the penny-post era another additional apartment was contrived inside the building, while the opening out of the district offices in London fifteen years afterwards gave increased space to the workers at St. Martin's-le-Grand. It is now proposed to build opposite the present structure to give accommodation to the new agencies called into operation in connexion with the Post-office ; and preliminary steps have already been taken in the matter.



Approaching the great hall of the General Post-office through one of the three-columned porticos, we post our letter, and as it is now nearly six o'clock P.M. we stand aside for a few minutes only, to witness one of the most stirring sights in the metropolis. Throughout the day, both sides of the hall present a busy enough scene. To the right hand is the *poste restante*, and the mart for postage-stamps, with its constant influx of visitors ; while on the opposite side, always open, and, more or less, always beset with people, are the newspaper and letter-boxes for the receipt of correspondence for all parts of the world. When a quarter to six chimes from the neighbouring clocks, the change in the appearance of the hall is most striking. As if it had been waiting for the opportunity to pass some hidden barrier, an impetuous crowd suddenly enters, and letters and newspapers at once begin to fall in quite a literary hail-storm. The huge slits running from one end of the hall to the other, which have been gaping for letters all the day, must now be widened, or the consequences would undoubtedly be serious among the hurrying crowd of people. Just at this period the windows over the newspaper-boxes used to be thrown open, and newspapers and bags were hurled with great force, and sometimes fury, into the sorting-room on the same floor. Now a capacious shoot is thrown wide open, which carries the newspapers deposited in it to a room underneath. This immense aperture no sooner opens its maw than it is surrounded and besieged by men and boys of all ages and costumes alike pushing, heaving, and surging in one great mass, who seek to feed the thing with heaps of papers, which fly thicker and faster than the driven snow. Now it is that small boys of eleven or twelve years of age—panting Sinbad-like under the weight of huge bundles of newspapers—manage somehow to dart about and make rapid *sorties* into other ranks of boys, utterly disregarding the cries of the official policemen, who vainly endeavour to reduce the tumult into something like post-office order. If the lads cannot quietly and easily disembody, they will whiz their missiles of intelligence over other people's heads, now and then sweeping off hats and caps with the force of shot. The gathering every moment increases in number and intensifies in purpose, and yet the cry is still they come. Heaps of papers of widely-opposed

political views are thrown in together, and what a stomach the Post-office monster must have to take in all! No longer sent in singly or by handfuls, they throw their distended sacks and baskets through the opening wholesale. Some official legends, with a very strong smack of probability about them, tell of sundry boys being offered, seized, emptied, and thrown out again *void*. As six o'clock approaches still nearer and nearer, the turmoil increases more perceptibly, for the intelligent British public is fully alive to the awful truth that the Post-office officials never allow a minute of grace, and that "newspaper fair" must be over when the last stroke of six is heard. *One*, in rush files of laggard boys, who have purposely loitered, in the hope of a little pleasurable excitement; *two*, and grown men hurry in with their last sacks; *three*, the struggle resembles nothing so much as a pantomimic *mêlée*; *four*, a very Babel of tongues; *five*, final and furious shower of papers and bags; and *six*, when all the openings and slits close like so many swords of Damocles, and with such a sudden and simultaneous snap, that we naturally suppose it to be a part of the Post-office operations that attempts should be made to guillotine a score of hands; and then all is over so far as the outsiders are concerned. Among the letter-boxes, scenes somewhat similar have been enacted, but we were too engrossed with the scene in the newspaper corner to notice them. Besides, we shall see the letters inside. The Post-office, like a huge monster, to which it has been more than once likened, has swallowed an enormous meal, and gorged to the full, it must now commence the process of digestion. While laggard boys to whom cartoons by one William Hogarth should be shown, are muttering "too late," and retiring discomfited, we, having obtained the requisite "open *sesame*," will make our way round the corner into the interior of the building.

We take the letter-rooms first. This part consists of an enormous apartment, well lit up, with long rows of double desks running from end to end, and one or two smaller rooms adjoining. We go to the end of it, which is close to the letter-boxes, to observe the first processes. Letters are still being posted in great numbers, for we distinctly hear them fluttering, flapping, and flopping in the box, even above the noise caused by the

different operations. On inquiry, we find that the public are posting letters with an extra stamp, in order that they may go with the mail which is now making up, and the number of these missives quite equals the whole number of letters posted daily in many a provincial town. After the ordinary letters are taken from the boxes, they are thrown on to a huge table, round which stand at least a dozen men, who are busy at work, much as if they were shuffling cards, but actually in the operation of placing each letter side by side with the address, and the postage-label uppermost, so that they may be easily struck with the stamp, and keeping all packets, parcels, and unpaid letters to themselves. We shall have no better opportunity throughout our entire Post-office progress than the present, whilst standing beside this table, to observe the letters with which the Post-office is entrusted. And the first thing which will strike an observer placed in such circumstances is, that the Post-office is eminently a democratic establishment, conducted on the most approved *fraternité et égalité* principles. The same sort of variety that marks society here marks its letters ; envelopes of all shades and sizes ; handwriting of all imaginable kinds, written in all shades of ink, with every description of pen ; names the oddest, and names the most ordinary, and patronymics to which no possible exception can be taken. Then to notice the seals. Here is one stamped with the escutcheoned signet of an earl ; another where the wax has yielded submissively to the initials of plain John Brown ; and yet another, plastered with cobbler's wax, with an impression that makes no figure in Burke or Debrett, but which, indeed, bears many evidences of having been manufactured with hob-nails. So much for the outsides. If we could but get a peep, what a much greater variety within ! Here, without doubt, are tidings of life and death, hope and despair, success and failure, triumph and defeat, joy and sorrow ; letters from friends, and notes from lawyers, appeals from children and stern advice or remonstrance from parents, offers from anxious-hearted young gentlemen, and "first yesses" or refusals from young maidens ; letters containing that snug appointment so long promised, and "little bills" with requests for immediate payment, "together with six-and-eightpence." Here are cream-coloured missives, which will doubtless be found to tell of happy consummations,

and black-edged envelopes which will still more certainly tell of death and the grave ; sober-looking advice-notes, doubtless telling when our "Mr. Puffwell" will "do himself the honour of calling" upon you, and elegant-looking billets in which "shocking business" is never mentioned, are here all jostling each other quite contentedly, and will do so for many hours.

After the operation of "facing" the letters is completed, they are taken to the stamping-tables to be stamped ; where all, without exception, are honoured with the selfsame knocks on the head, an operation which results in the imprinting upon each the date, hour, and place of posting, as well as the total disfigurement of the postage-stamp. The operation of stamping at the General Post-office gives employment to about a dozen men at once, part of whom stamp by hand and part by machinery. Each can manage to strike, on an average, about one hundred letters per minute.<sup>1</sup> Unpaid letters are kept apart, as they require stamping in a different coloured ink, and with the double postage. Such letters, we may here interpolate, create much extra labour, and are a source of incessant trouble to the department, inasmuch as from the time of their posting in London to their delivery at the Land's End or John O'Groats, every officer through whose hands they may pass has to keep a cash account of them. The double postage on such letters is more than earned by the Post-office. All unfastened and torn letters, too, are picked out, and conveyed to another portion of the large room, and it requires the unremitting attention of at least one busy individual to finish the work left undone by the British public. It is scarcely credible that about 250 letters daily are posted *open*, and bearing not the slightest mark of ever having been fastened in any way ; but such is the fact. It is on record, that on one occasion a letter containing 2,000*l.* in notes and bills was posted at the General Post-office in this state ! A frightful source of extra work to this branch arises through the posting of flimsy boxes, containing feathers, slippers, and other *recherché* articles of female dress, pill-boxes containing jewellery ; and even bottles, covered over with paper only. The latter, however, are detained, glass articles and sharp instruments of any sort, whenever detected, being returned to the senders.

<sup>1</sup> The letters are counted as they are struck with the stamp.

The other frail things, thrown in and buried under the heaps of correspondence, get crushed and broken, yet all are made up again as carefully as possible and resealed.

When the letters have been stamped, and those insufficiently paid are picked out, they are carried away to undergo the process of sorting. In this operation they are very rapidly divided into "roads," representing a line of large towns all lying in one direction; thus, letters for Derby, Loughborough, Nottingham, Leicester, and Lincoln, &c. may be placed in companionship in one division or "road," and Bilston, Wednesbury, Walsall, Stourbridge, Dudley, &c. in another. When this primary divisional sorting is finished, each mass of letters is conveyed into different parts of the room, to be divided and subdivided over again until in this way all the letters for one town are gathered together. This divisional work is now very much assisted by the employment of district sorting-carriages on some of the principal lines of railways converging in the metropolis. Letters for each of these travelling-carriages are simply sorted once, and are subdivided into towns on the railway. It is into one of these unfinished masses of work that our own letter falls, to be seen again, however when we come to describe the Travelling Post-offices.

Having witnessed the letter-sorting, even to the tying up of the bundles and the placing of them into their respective bags, we will make our way into the newspaper department, and we have chosen our time well, for at this moment some half-filled bags are about to be sent into an upper story to be completed by getting their quota of newspapers put into them, and we can go with them and save our strength. By a series of "hoists" or lifts, not only baskets and bags, but sorters, letter-carriers, and such strangers as may visit the Office may be most conveniently transferred from the bottom to the top of the building, and back again very quickly. These lifts, one at each end of the Inland Office, and a smaller one in the foreign department, were suggested by Mr. Bokenham, the present Controller of the Circulation Office, and one of the oldest officers in the establishment, and are very ingenious. During office-hours they constantly travel up one way, round the top, and down the other shaft with several boxes or platforms (for the men and bags)

circulating very much like the buckets of a dredging-machine. Arrived at the next floor, we step out and find ourselves among huge piles of newspapers, which have been, and still are, undergoing the same operations as we noticed in the case of the letters, only everything is on a much larger scale—larger desks, larger boxes, larger bags. Most of the newspapers do not require stamping, as the impressed stamp is still largely used. As many of the newspapers escape from their covers during the excitement of posting, each night two or three officers are busily engaged during the whole time of despatch, in endeavouring to restore wrappers to newspapers found without any address. To illustrate the care taken in all such casualties—which might be avoided to a great extent by the public—we may state that the addresses of all such newspapers are carefully entered in a large ledger, and the following notice, signed by the Secretary, is put into the newspapers appropriated to stray addresses :—

“Several newspapers having escaped from their covers in the newspaper-office this evening from the imperfect manner in which they were enclosed in them, they have been replaced as correctly as possible; but as the accompanying paper may not be the one originally intended for you, I beg to explain, that the inconvenience you may be subjected to has not been occasioned by this department.”

It will be easily understood how sad mistakes may thus occur, and many persons get newspapers very uncongenial to their tastes ; yet it will be at once admitted, that when a certain writer charges the Post-office with “diminished care” in this and other matters, he has not acquainted himself with the steps invariably taken by the authorities to meet such cases.

We pass rapidly through several other rooms. In one the foreign letters are being sorted, weighed, and packed in the boxes painted in all the colours of the rainbow, according to the country or colony to which they are destined ; in another a score or more of clerks are busy dealing with registered letters, tying them round with tape, entering the addresses in books and on sheets, and then securing them in green cloth bags, which will eventually be placed in the ordinary letter-bags ; in another division of the building letters are being sorted for the metropolis, and letter-carriers are busy arranging them in order

to their delivery. Having seen all these varied processes we return again to the principal office. It still presents a busy scene, yet retains the utmost order and regularity. Scores of men are engaged in the various operations of sorting and subsorting, yet all proceeds quite noiselessly, as if the thousands of letters representing the commerce and intelligence of the English people could not be treated too carefully. Every now and again the sorter pauses in his rapid movements, and places a letter on one side. In some cases this signifies that he has detected a letter containing a *coin* of some sort ; and when such letters have been posted without being registered by the sender, the department takes this duty upon itself, not without charge, however, for the consignee must pay a double registration fee upon delivery. The number of letters of this class detected in London alone during the first six months after this plan was brought into operation was upwards of 58,000. The practice which before the arrangement of which we here speak, kept growing on a thoughtless economy, to the temptation and seduction of many of the officers, is now steadily decreasing, and ere long, let us hope, will be unknown. Letters again, which cannot be read, or those imperfectly addressed, are also thrown on one side, and conveyed to another part of the branch, where two or three gentlemen, whose extraordinary faculty of discernment have gained them the singularly inappropriate name of "blind officers," pursue their tedious avocation.

#### THE BLIND LETTER OFFICE

is the receptacle for all illegible, misspelt, misdirected, or insufficiently addressed letters or packets. Here the clerk, or clerks, selected from amongst the most experienced officers, guess at what ordinary intelligence would readily denominate insoluble riddles. Large numbers of letters are posted daily with supercriptions which the sorters cannot decipher, and which the great majority of people would not be able to read. Others, again, are received with perhaps only the name of some small village, the writers thinking it a work of supererogation to add some neighbouring town, or even a county. Numberless, for instance, are the letters bearing such addresses as "John Smith, gardener, Flowerdale," or "Throgmorton Hall, Worcestershire."

Circulars, by the thousand, are posted in London and other large towns without hesitancy, and with the greatest confidence in the "final perseverance" principle of the Post-office people, with addresses not more explicit than the foregoing. Many country gentlemen would seem to cherish the idea that the names of their mansions should be known equally far and near from their manorial acres, and somehow they seem to inoculate their correspondents with the same absurd notion. If, however, it be possible to reduce the hieroglyphics on some strange letter to ordinary every-day English, or find, from diligent search in his library of reference, information relative to imperfectly-addressed letters (information which might have been given much more easily by the senders), our readers may be sure that the cunning gentleman of the Blind Office, justly known for his patience and sagacity, will do it, unless, indeed, the letter be "stone blind," or hopelessly incomplete. As a genuine example of stone-blind letters, take the following, the first of a batch which has been known to pass through the blind-room of the General Post-office :—

Uncle John  
Hopposite the Church  
London. Hingland

It would certainly have been a wonderful triumph of skill to have put this letter in a fair way for delivery : for once the blind officer would acknowledge himself beaten ; and then the Dead Letter Officers would endeavour to find "Uncle John's" *relative*, intimating to the said relative that greater explicitness was needed if "Uncle John" must be found.

But they manage better with the next letter in the batch.

Coneyach lunentick  
a siliam



is part of the address of a letter which the sorter no doubt threw away from him with some impatience. The blind officer, however, reads it instantly, strikes his pen, perhaps, through the address, and writes on the envelope, "Colney Hatch Lunatic Asylum," and passes it out for delivery.

Obern yenen.

is seen in an instant to be meant for "Holborn Union." "Isle of Wight" is, in like manner, written on a letter improperly addressed as follows :—

Ann M——

Oileywhite

Amshire

The probability is that the last-mentioned letter will come back to the Dead Letter-office, on account of no town being given in the address ; still, the usual course is to send it out to the local district designated, there being always the possibility that certain individuals may be locally known.

"*Ashby-de-la-Zouch*" is a town to spell which gives infinite trouble to letter-writers ; but the Post-office official is especially lenient and patient in cases of this kind. There are fifty different ways of spelling the name, and few letters, except those of the better classes, give it rightly spelt. "*Hasbedellar-such*" is the ordinary spelling among the poor living at a distance.

Ash Bedles in such

for John Horsel, grinder

in the county of Lestysheer

is a copy of a veritable address meant for the above town.

The blind-letter officers of an earlier date succumbed before the following letter :—

For Mister Willy wot brinds de Baber  
in Lang-Gaster ware te gal is

but the dead-letter officers were enabled from the contents to make out that it was meant for the editor of a Lancaster paper, "where the gaol is." The communication enclosed was an essay written by a foreigner against public schools!

The blind officers are supplied with all the principal London and provincial directories, court guides, gazetteers, &c. ; and by the help of this, their library of reference, added to their own experience and intelligence, they are generally able to put again into circulation without the necessity of opening them, five out of six of all the letters which are handed over to them. The addresses of some letters are at once seen to be the result of mistake on the part of senders. Letters addressed "Lombard Street, Manchester," "St. Paul's Churchyard, Liverpool," both obviously intended for London, are sent out for trial by the letter-carriers at what are believed to be their real destinations. (See *Ninth Report*.) Letters, again, for persons of rank and eminence, dignitaries of the Church, prominent officers of the army or navy, whose correct addresses are known, or can be ascertained, are immediately sent out for delivery to their right destination, however erroneously directed, without question or examination of contents. The following strange letters, meant for the eye of royalty, would not be impeded in their progress in any way :—

Keen Vic Tory at  
Winer Casel

and

Mrs. Prince Albert  
Balmory Castle  
Scotland

and another —

Miss  
Queene Victoria  
of England

would go to Windsor Castle and Balmoral without fail ; while the following, posted in London at the breaking-out of the Polish Insurrection, would find its way to St. Petersburg as fast as packet could carry it :—

To the King of Rusheya  
Feoren, with speed.

When the letter-carriers and the blind officers have expended all their skill upon certain letters in vain, the next step is to send them to

#### THE DEAD-LETTER OFFICE,

in order that they may be returned to the writers, provided any clue can be obtained from the contents as to their whereabouts. The branch in which this work is accomplished is now a very considerable establishment, employing at least a score more clerks, &c. than in the days of the old postage. In 1763, just a hundred years ago, the records show that two clerks only were engaged in opening "dead and insolvent letters." Now, nearly fifty officers are employed in the same duties. Nor are these duties by any means so only in name. In 1863 considerably over two millions of letters were returned to their writers through the Dead-letter Office from failures in the attempts to deliver them. "Three-quarters of the non-deliveries," says the Post-master-General, "were on account of the letters being insufficiently or incorrectly addressed, nearly 11,000 letters having been posted *without any address at all.*"

In every provincial post-office in England and Wales a dead or returned letter-bag is now forwarded daily to London, containing all the letters which, from any cause, cannot be delivered. Each letter bears on its front, written prominently in red ink, the reason for its non-delivery. Thus, if the addressee cannot be found, or should have left the town, the words "Cannot be found," or "Gone—left no address," are written respectively. On the arrival of these bags in London, inclosed in the larger bags containing the general correspondence, they are at once passed to the "returned-letter branch," as the Dead-letter Office is called, where no time is lost in opening them. Every letter received is first examined by an experienced and responsible officer, to make sure that it has been actually presented according to its address, and that the reason assigned on the cover of the letter is sufficient to account for its non-delivery. In doubtful cases, before the letter is opened, the directories and other books of reference, of which there is a plentiful supply in this office, are consulted, and should it be found or thought that there has been any oversight or neglect, the letter is re-issued, with proper instructions, by the first post. About 300 letters are thus re-issued daily, many of which ultimately reach the persons for whom they are intended.

When it has been fully ascertained that nothing further can be done to effect the delivery of an imperfectly or improperly addressed letter, it only remains to have it sent back to the writer. This is done, if possible, without the letter being opened. By an arrangement of ten years' standing, if the returned letter has the writer's name and address embossed on the back of the envelope, impressed on the seal, or written or printed anywhere outside, it will not be opened, but be forwarded back according to this address. We may point out here, however, that this arrangement, excellent and satisfactory as it is, has sometimes led to serious mistakes and confusion ; so much so, in fact, that the Postmaster-General, in his report for 1861, appealed to the public on the subject. It would appear that the practice of using another person's embossed envelope is on the increase. When such a letter, according to the arrangement, is forwarded to the supposed writer, it has frequently fallen into the wrong hands (the master and merchant instead of the clerk or other

servant), and grievous complaints have been made on the subject. The remedy, of course, lies with letter-writers themselves. If there are no outward marks to indicate the sender, the letter is then opened, and, if a suitable address can be found inside, the letter is enclosed in the well-known dead-letter envelope and forwarded according to that address. If a letter should be found to contain anything of value, such as bank-notes, drafts, postage-stamps, the precaution is taken of having a special record made of it, and it is then sent back as a registered dead letter. Money to the value of 12,000*l.* or 14,000*l.* is annually found in these returned letters. Of this sum about 500*l.* per annum falls into the public exchequer, on account of no address being found inside, and no inquiry being made for the missing letters. A vast number of bank post-bills and bills of exchange are likewise found, amounting in all, and on the average, to something like 3,000,000*l.* a year. These bills, however, as well as money-order advices, always afford some clue to the senders, even supposing no address should be given inside the letter, and inquiries are set on foot at the bankers and others whose names may be given in the paper transactions. Forty thousand letters reach the English returned branch each year containing property of different kinds. Many presents, such as rings, pins, brooches, never reach their destination, and are never sent back to the sender, because they are often unaccompanied with any letter. These articles, of course, become the property of the Crown.

Postmasters of Irish towns send their "dead and insolvent letters" to Dublin, and the residuum of the local Scotch post-towns are sent to Edinburgh. In both these capitals, this particular class of letters is dealt with in exactly the same manner as in the London office. We are assured that the letters themselves, and the articles found in the Scotch and Irish dead letters, illustrate no little the characters, the feeling, and the habits of the two people. The Scotch have, comparatively speaking, the fewest dead letters; and as the writers are generally careful to give their addresses inside the letters, little trouble is said to be experienced in returning them, if it is necessary. The Irish dead letters are more numerous than either the English or the Scotch. This mainly arises from the circumstance of the nomadic habits of a considerable portion of the Irish people: owing also to the

same circumstance, it is impossible to return many of the letters to the writers. The Scotch dead letters rarely contain coin or any very valuable enclosures, while of articles of jewellery, such as usually form presents or tokens of affection, we are told there is a "lamentable deficiency." The Irish dead letters, on the contrary, "are full of little *cadeaux* and small sums of money," illustrating at the same time both the careless and the affectionate nature of the people.

Letters which can neither be delivered nor returned through the Post-office, are, if found to be valuable, and if posted in the United Kingdom, appropriated to a fund for assisting the officers to insure their lives; if received for delivery from a foreign State, they are sent back to the chief office of that country for final disposition. Letters posted in this country found to be of no value, are kept at the Post-office for a month and then destroyed; foreign letters under the same circumstances are not destroyed for two months.

And now, unless we at once return from our digression, we shall not be in time to see the great night-mail despatched from St. Martin's-le-Grand. Whilst we have been occupied with a contemplation of the few waifs and strays of our national correspondence, the great bulk of that correspondence has been well and carefully disposed of: the letters and newspapers which we saw two hours ago as a mass of inextricable confusion, are now carefully stowed away in their respective bags, and not a letter or newspaper can be found. The hall clock is silently approaching the hour of eight, when the bags must all be sealed and ready to leave the place. At five minutes before that time, all is still bustle and activity; five minutes perhaps after that hour the establishment is nearly deserted. "Everything is done on military principles to minute time." "The drill and subdivision of duties are so perfect," adds a close observer, "that the alternations are high pressure and sudden collapse." This is the more remarkable, inasmuch as the Post-office is subject to great variations in the amount of work to be done. Particular nights in the week, Mondays and Tuesdays for example, are known as the "heaviest," and even such events as elections, influence the labour to be performed within the same given time. During the

last election for Lambeth, 40,000 circulars were posted in London in one day, and properly disposed of. On the 14th of February, 1864, 957,000 extra letters, or valentines, passed through the Circulation Office in London.

In place of the old mail-coaches waiting in the yard of the office until the work is completed inside, we have now the well-known mail-vans. As they are rapidly supplied with bags, they chase each other to the various railway stations, from which, to all points of the compass, the night mails now depart. Half an hour afterwards, we find ourselves in one of these trains watching operations not dissimilar to those we have just left, but much more wonderful, considering how they are accomplished.

#### THE TRAVELLING POST-OFFICE.

The travelling post-office deserves special attention, not less on account of the interesting nature of the work performed, than because it serves many important ends in the system of which it forms a part. It is to the railway post-offices that the Department is indebted for much of the simplification of its accounts. At different points in a mail-coach journey, long stoppages used to be made in order that the "bye" and "forward" letters might get sorted; on the introduction of railways, it was seen that the number of bags must either be enormously increased, and other complications arise, or the railways could not to any extent be rendered available for post-office purposes. Just at this juncture, it was suggested that the work might be done during the journey, and the obstacles were soon surmounted. Further, by means of the travelling offices, the Post-office is enabled to offer more time for the posting of letters, and not only so, but to give the public the benefit of earlier deliveries. \*

The railway-mail service has now assumed quite gigantic proportions. Twenty-six years ago, when railways were only partially used for post-office purposes, a writer predicted that they would "soon become the *ne plus ultra* of rapidity," and that the Post-office would have to take to them more and more. "In a few years," said the writer, "railways will have become so general, that scarcely a mail-coach will be left in England; certainly, none will be wanted in London." Both predictions have since been verified; for the last twenty years, railways have gradually

absorbed all the mail contracts,—year by year the estimates for this service showing a corresponding increase. The first railway post-office journey was made on the Grand Junction Railway, between Liverpool and Birmingham, on the 1st of July, 1837. When the line was completed to London, in January, 1838, the travelling office started from the metropolis. The following curious account of the “Grand Northern Railway Post-office,” as it was called, is culled from the *Penny Magazine*. “On the arrival of the four ‘accelerators’ at the Euston Station with the mails, the railway servants immediately carry the large sacks to a huge-looking machine, with a tender attached to it, both at the end of the train. This caravan is the flying Post-office, with a table for sorting letters, and holes round the walls for their reception.” The carriage was certainly either an ungainly structure, or the above is a most ungainly report. “In ten minutes,” continues the narrator, “the omnibuses are emptied of their contents, and the train of carriages is then *wound up* to the station at Camden Town, where the engine is attached, and the Primrose Hill tunnel soon prevents us hearing the thunder of their rapid progress.” The Londoner of 1864, in these days of metropolitan railways, can afford to smile at this last sentence. That the change in the system of mail conveyance wrought immediate and striking improvement at the post-office does not admit of question. In a contemporary account, we find an interesting but wonder-stricken writer stating that “by means of the extra railway facilities, letters now pass along this line (London and Birmingham) in a space of time so inconceivably quick, that some time must elapse before our ideas become accustomed to such a rapid mode of intercourse.”

When the railways were extended farther northwards, the Railway Post-office was extended with them, and was formed into sections. Thus, when the lines were continued north as far as Lancaster, there were two divisions formed, one staff of clerks, &c. to the number of eight, working between London and Birmingham, and ten between Birmingham and Lancaster.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> On the arrival of the mail at Rugby, the bags for such places as Leicester, Derby, Lincoln, Leeds, York, Newcastle and Edinburgh were left: subsequently another branch of the railway post-office was started, which travelled from Rugby to York. After leaving Rugby, the mail continued its progress to Birmingham; thence by the Grand Junction Railway to Crewe, where the Irish letters were given off to go to Chester; thence to Parkside on the Liver-



There were two mails each day in both directions. The distance between London and Lancaster (241 miles) was accomplished in eleven hours and a half. The weight of the railway post-office, tender, bags, and clerks, is stated by Mr. Wishaw, in his work on railways, to have been at that period about nine tons. At present, on the great trunk line of the London and North Western Railway Company, no fewer than eight mail-trains run daily up and down, each conveying railway post-office carriages and post-office employes. Two of these trains are run specially, the number of passengers being limited. The weight of mails running over this ground must have increased fourfold at the least, since 1839, inasmuch as the number of officers have been augmented in even a greater proportion. Surprising as was the speed at which the first railway post-office travelled, and wonderful as it was thought at the time, one of the mail-trains now runs nearly double the distance between London and Lancaster during the time which used to be taken for that ground alone. *The Limited night-mail*, travelling between the Euston-square station in London, and Perth in Scotland, accomplishes the distance of 451 miles in eleven hours and a half, or about forty miles an hour including stoppages!

The railway post-office proper, is now extended over nearly every considerable line of railway in the kingdom. It comprises a number of divisions or sections, named generally from the locality through which they extend, or the railway travelled over, as the Bangor and Leeds division, the Caledonian division. The four principal or trunk mails, three of them being divided into two sections, are (1) the North-Western Railway post-office, travelling between London and Carlisle; (2) the Irish Mail, between London and Holyhead; (3) the Great Western, between London and Exeter; and (4) the Midland, between Bristol and Newcastle-on-Tyne. Most of these divisions have *day* as well as *night*-mails running over them daily. Four trains a day, being two in each direction, are therefore the usual proportion of mails on the chief lines of railway. As London is the *heart* of the postal system, so these four principal pool and Manchester railway, where the bags for these two towns were left. The train then ran over the North Union railway to Preston, and from Preston by the Preston and Lancaster line to Lancaster.—*Penny Magazine*. The above, with some few divergences, is now the mail route to Scotland.

mails may be termed its *main arteries*, while as veins in the great system, there are a number of smaller divisions of the railway post-office that have not been enumerated. Again, at other parts or points not important or extensive enough for travelling offices, railway trains are arranged to wait the arrival of the trunk mails; and thus, to continue the figure, our letters—the life-blood of a nation's commerce and sociality—are conveyed to the remotest corners of the country.

It may be imagined that a proper control of this vast machinery, extending through almost every county in the kingdom, with its scattered staff of officials, will be difficult; but the efficient working of the whole is nevertheless as thoroughly and promptly maintained as in any other department where personal supervision is more direct. Each divisional part has distinct officers allotted to it, the number of *clerks* being regulated according to the number of mails running over the division in the course of a day, and the number of *sorters* according to the amount of sorting duties to be performed. Each mail travels under the charge of one clerk, while each division is locally superintended by one senior clerk. The entire direction, however, of all the travelling officers is vested in the Inspector-General of Mails, who also presides over the Mail Office at St. Martin's-le-Grand. We may here further state, that the *length* of the divisions—the extent of one of which forms a post-office journey or “trip”—varies slightly, averaging about 170 miles; the average *time* taken to perform the trips being between five and six hours. As a rule, the night-mails travel during the night-time, or between eight P.M. and six A.M.; the day-mails generally speaking throughout the day.

But we must make ready for our journey, and enter more into detail. While van after van is arriving with its heavy loads of mail-bags, we have time to notice that the train standing at the great London terminus is nearly all post-office. Two or three carriages are being filled as full as possible with made-up bags, and two more, fitted up like post-offices, are simply meant for operations similar to those we have already seen at the General Post-office, in connexion with the unfinished work which has now to be accomplished during the journey. It is with the remaining carriage only that we have to do. Seen

from the outside, the office itself may still answer to the description given of it twenty-five years ago by our authority above adverted to, although considerable improvements must have been made in its construction since that time. Though the structure is built with a very evident serviceable purpose, the large, heavily-painted, windowless vehicle, looks more as if intended for the conveyance of Her Majesty's horses than Her Majesty's mails; the roof, however, covered with glass, with other contrivances for the purposes of ventilation, soon convinces us that it is intended for some description of the *genus homo*. We go inside, and find it built like an ordinary saloon-carriage, about twenty-two feet long, and as wide and spacious as the railway arrangements will allow. It is night-time, the reader will remember, and the interior looks warm and cheerful with its row of bright-burning moderator lamps, and, in this respect, contrasts strongly and pleasantly, as far as we are concerned, with the dimly-lighted station, through which the cold night air is rushing. The reader who is following us in this description must abstain from imagining anything like luxury in the internal fittings. Everything here is requisite for accomplishing the work in hand, but there is no provision for any kind of indulgence; and spacious as the place seems at a first glance, there is not to be found, when we come to look narrowly, a single foot of spare room. Along the whole length of one side of the carriage, and encroaching materially upon its width, a number of tiers of boxes—the “holes” of our ancient authority—are arranged for the sorting processes; the smaller ones for the letters, and the larger ones in the centre of the office—more like shelves, many of them being movable—for the newspapers and all that vast variety of articles forwarded according to the rules of book-post. Every available inch of space on the other side of the office is covered with upright pegs, in recesses sunk in the carriage-sides, upon which are hung the bags—now made of canvas, with the names of towns conspicuously painted upon them—to be used in the course of the journey. These recesses, as well as the two ends of the office, are well padded over, to secure additional safety to the officers in the event of any accident.<sup>1</sup> Under the desks or counters, which run from one end

<sup>1</sup> The construction of the offices has been entirely altered of late years with this view, and they are now as safe as they can well be made.

of the carriage to the other, bags are packed, to be given out as the train arrives at the respective stations.

In less time, however, than it would take to read the foregoing, the mail has speeded miles away, and reached, by this time, the fox-covers and game-preserves of those Hertfordshire landowners who, when the railway was projected, expressed the wish that its concoctors "were at rest in Paradise!" The train possibly "thundered" through Camden Town as it used to do in olden times, but it would be but a momentary sensation, not to speak of the inhabitants being now quite accustomed to it. The Post-office work commenced when the train left the station. The bags were quickly seized by the proper sorter, cut, and their contents turned out on the desk. Then he distributes what he finds in the bags according to a pre-arranged order. The registered letters which have found their way to the office he at once transfers to the clerk on duty whose special province it is to deal with them; the bundles of ordinary letters—in one of which packets is the identical letter we ourselves posted—he hands over to his fellow-sorters, who, each standing opposite to a distinct set of boxes, labelled with the names of different towns on the route, at once sort them away. The newspapers he deals with himself. The work thus started, the scene presently becomes one of considerable animation and a pleasant-enough sort of excitement, till every bundle of letters is cut open and disposed of in the boxes. There is then a lull, but it is only temporary. It is true that the train will not stop till the county of Warwickshire is reached; but the intervening country is provided for nevertheless—arrangements having been made that at all the towns we pass the exchange of letter-bags shall be effected by means of machinery whilst the train is progressing at its usual speed. The contrivance in question deserves minute description.<sup>1</sup> The machinery is not worked in

<sup>1</sup> The contrivance for exchanging mail-bags is now used at more than a hundred different railway-stations. At some stations it is used four, six, and eight times every working day. Mr. Ramsy, of the General Post-office is said to have suggested the machinery in question; but his original invention was rude and somewhat unsatisfactory in application. Mr. Dicker made improvements in its construction so that it could be generally used. For his services, Mr. Dicker received from the Lords of the Treasury the sum of 500*l.* and the Postmaster-General found him a place as "Supervisor of Mail-bag Apparatus." Mr. Pearson Hill is credited with further improvements, such

the post-office, but in an adjoining van. By means, however, of a substantial iron gangway, the two carriages are connected, so that we can pass easily from one to the other and see the operation itself. As we do so we are evidently nearing some town, for the sorter is at that moment engaged in peering out of the window into the darkness in search of some familiar object, such as bridge, river, or cluster of trees, by means of which he is enabled to tell his whereabouts with almost mathematical precision. Whilst he is busy finding his position we will take the time to explain, that the machinery is arranged so as to secure, simultaneously in most cases, both the receipt and the despatch of bags. For the purpose of receiving bags, a large strong net is fixed to one side of the van, to be drawn down at the proper moment; and close to the door, on each side of it, securely fixed to the carriage, are hollow iron bars, inside each of which, working by means of a rope and pulley, an iron arm is fixed, upon which the bags to be delivered, securely strapped in a thick, leathern pouch, are suspended. Where the exchange has to be effected at the station we are nearing, the arrangements are just the counterparts of this. A net is spread to catch each pouch from the extended arm of the carriage, and pouches are hung from iron standards in the ground of sufficient height for the net in the train. The operation itself is just commencing. The door is pushed back into the groove in which it works, and then the sorter, touching a spring that holds up the net, it is loosened from its supports, and projects over the carriage-sides; the iron arm, acting on its pulley-rope, is drawn round into the carriage, where the pouch is rapidly fastened to it by means of a catch or spring—but in such a manner that a touch from the net-apparatus at the station will bring it off—and then let down, remaining by virtue of its own weight at right angles to the door. A moment of waiting, and then all the machinery acts its assigned part properly; the pouch disappears from the arm (or arms, if the bags have been heavy enough for two to be used), and at the same moment another descends into the post-office net, and all is over and quiet as before. We mean, of course, compa-

as the double arm, so that the machinery might be made available for the larger stations.

rative quiet, as much as is possible amid the din and endless rattle of a train speeding at the rate of forty miles an hour.

We follow the sorter as he makes his way back into the post-office carriage, carrying with him the treasures we have watched him pick up by the wayside. These new arrivals disposed of in the orthodox way, and the process repeated two or three times, there is suddenly a movement among the officers as they busy themselves in collecting from the different boxes all the letters that have been received from first to last for the bags about to be despatched at the approaching town—the first junction station. The letters in question are examined to test the correctness of the sorting, then tied up in bundles in a sharp and decisive way, then placed away carefully in the several bags, which are tied, sealed, and ready for delivery just as the train is brought to a stand. Here they are given out ; fresh supplies are received from a number of large towns in the immediate district, and the train is again on its way. The bags received are at once opened ; the same round of sorting, collecting, examining, is gone through ; the same process of despatching for the next and all subsequent postal stages is repeated, just as we have described. Little variation is noticed, except that at certain points a much larger number of bags are thrown into the office—for instance, as the train nears the more thickly populated parts of the midland counties, then the “black country,” as it is called, and subsequently the manufacturing districts. At one of these points a considerable addition was made to the staff of sorters, who fell at once to work in the vacant spaces left for them. And it was not before they were required ; for presently the train arrives at one of the principal mail junctions in the kingdom, where an immense number of bags wait our arrival. These bags have been brought somewhat earlier on, by other mail-trains, arranged so as to effect a junction with us ; these having in their turn met with other trains running across the country in transverse directions. Thus there are here, bags from towns near and towns remote, containing letters for places from which we are, as yet, hundreds of miles distant. The work, however, will be resumed with increased activity, according to the number of letters which may be forthcoming, only whatever number there may be, all must be finished in a given time. So far, the reader

may imagine the duty to be one of dull routine and very monotonous ; so as a rule we believe it is : there are circumstances connected with the manner of travelling, however, which conspire to make it at times somewhat varied and exceptional. One moment, and we are clattering down a hill, and the sorting partakes, to some extent, of the same tear-away speed ; another time, we are panting up a line of steep gradient, and the letters find their boxes very deliberately ; now, the rails are somewhat out of order, or the coupling of the carriages has not been well attended to, or we are winding round a succession of sharp curves, and can scarcely keep our feet as the carriage lurches first to one side, then to the other ; in all which cases, not only is our own equilibrium a source of difficulty to us, but we see that things proceed anything but smoothly among the letters, which refuse to go in at all, or go in with a spirited evolution, fluttering outside, and then landing at their destination upside down, or in some other way transgressing official rules in such case made and provided.

Hitherto all has been bustle and constant work ; now it seems as if the strain upon the workers had materially lessened, the change being accounted for by the fact that the country through which we are now proceeding is only thinly supplied with towns. The sorters, glad of a little relaxation, take advantage of the break in the character of the duty, and produce from their hiding-places under the blue cloth-covered counter, an oval kind of swing-seat attached to it, which turns outside somewhat ingeniously upon a swivel, and henceforth seat themselves at their work. This work is now that of examination to test the correctness of the preceding sorting process, for which work there is generally sufficient time allowed. It is now that looking over the shoulders of the sorters engaged in this operation we find amusement in the variety and strangeness of so many of the addresses of the letters. Some say too little, others too much ; some give the phonetic system with *malice prepense*, others because it is Nature's own rendering, and they have never known school ! Sometimes (and the practice is growing) the envelope is covered with long advertisements, for the benefit and information of the Post-office officials, we presume, in which case it is difficult to arrive at the

proper address of the letter at the first or even second glance. Some give the address of the *sender* in prominent printed characters, and it is surely not a matter of wonder, though often of complaint, when the letter finds its way back to the sender. In the case of the rebus addresses, or those where they are not written but pricked with a pin, and otherwise painfully elaborated, the sorter has his patience and ingenuity exercised to no little extent. In all such instances time is of course lost to the Post-office and the work of examination is necessarily deliberate, hesitating or slow. At one point, the quota of letters from the sister isle is received, and it is then perhaps that the sorter's patience is put to the severest test. The addresses of the poorer Irish are at times so involved—generally being sent to the care of one or two individuals, “or any dacent neighbour”—that they frequently present the appearance of a little wilderness of words. The English poor oftener show their unbounded confidence in the Post-office officials by leaving out some essential part of the address, while the Scotch, as a rule, attain the golden mean in such matters. We believe the statistics of the dead-letter offices of the three countries confirm, to some considerable extent, our rough generalizations.

After all, however, the cases of blunder are exceptional ; and as no really blind letters are found in the travelling post-office, because no letters are posted here, little difficulty, comparatively speaking, is felt, and nothing but ordinary patience and the Rosetta stone of experience are needed for the due performance of the duty. The great majority of letters are like the great majority of people—ordinary, unexceptionable, and mediocre. In the railway post-office, however, much is learned from the habit of association. The officer, of course, takes some degree of interest in the towns on his ride ; for, almost domesticated on the rail, he becomes a sort of denizen of those towns he is constantly passing, and sees, or fancies he does, from the letters that arrive from them, a kind of corroboration of all he has settled in his mind with regard to them. Almost every town has its distinctive kind of letters. That town we just passed is manufacturing, and the letters are almost entirely confined to sober-looking advice-cards, circulars, prices current, and invoices, generally very similar in kind and appearance, in good-sized



envelopes, with very plainly written or printed addresses. Now and then a lawyer's letter, written in a painfully distinct hand, or a thick, fat, banker's letter, groaning under the weight of bills and notes, escapes from company such as we have described ; but still the letters sustain the town's real character. Now we are at an old country town, with quiet-going people, living as their fathers did before them, and inheriting not only their money and lands, but their most cherished principles : their letters are just as we expected, little, quiet, old-fashioned-looking things, remarkable for nothing so much as their fewness. *Now* we are among the coal-districts, and almost all the letters have a smudged appearance, making you imagine that they must have been written by the light of pit-candles, in some region of carbon "two hundred fathoms down." *This* bag comes from a sea-bathing place, and so long as summer continues, will unmistakably remind you of sea-shore, sea-sand, and sea anemones. *These* bags have previously had to cross a broad sea-ferry, and the letters tell of salt water as certainly as if they were so many fishes. Another twenty miles, and we come to an old cathedral town with its letters looking as orthodox as any Convocation could wish ; whilst that other town is clearly a resort of fashion, if we may judge from the finely scented, perfumed, elegant-looking billets that escape from its post-bag.

And thus interested and observing, we are rapidly reaching our destination. We are at the terminus at last. The office is emptied of all its contents, and the bags, securely made up, are forwarded under care of other officers in different trains, proceeding far and near. Nor have we forgotten our own letter. In the vast mass of letters it holds a well-secured place, being safely ensconced in one of these very bags ; and we will endeavour to be present when the bag is opened, that we may verify our assertion. Out of the carriage and once on *terra firma*, we feel a sensation of dreamy wonder that nothing has happened to us ; that, considering the noise, and the whirl, and the excitement of the work we have witnessed, our brain is not tied up in a knot somewhere in the head, instead of only swimming. Dusty, tired, and sleepy, we hurry through the streets for refreshment, if not repose, while the day is just breaking.

Of course, this Post-office machinery, which we have attempted

to describe, is necessarily delicate and liable to derangements, inasmuch as it has to depend to a great extent on the proper carrying out throughout the country of an infinite number of railway arrangements. Its successful working is doubtless primarily due to the special time chosen for the conveyance of mails. The ordinary traffic disposed of, the mail-trains take its place, and through the long night the best part of the Post-office work is accomplished. The good or bad management of railway companies may assist or retard the efficiency of the Post-office to an almost incalculable extent. The railway post-office is like a gigantic machine, one part interdependent on another, and all alike dependent on the motive power of the different contracting parties. Railway accidents are fruitful sources of discomfiture to the Post-office Department. The mail-trains have, within the last two or three years, enjoyed an immunity from any very serious calamity of this nature : yet even when this is not the case, it very seldom happens that the Post-office arrangements suffer, except on the particular journey wherein the accident occurred. Fresh supplies of men and *matériel* are summoned with a speed that would, or ought to, surprise some other commissariat departments, and the work proceeds the next day or night as if the equilibrium had never been disturbed.

#### A PROVINCIAL POST-OFFICE.

Thirty years ago the arrangements in the north-country town of the district to which our imaginary letter was addressed, and which we have engaged to visit, were, like the arrangements of all other towns in England of its size, of the most primitive kind. The town itself had always held a certain important position in the district. Even anterior to the establishment of the British Post-office, it was the first town of its county. Subsequently, being on the direct line of one of the principal mail routes, and now in these days of railways somewhat similarly situated, it always was, and still is, a kind of junction for the neighbourhood. Postally speaking, it was always a place of importance, as it included within its boundaries nearly a hundred villages, all of which derived their letter-sustenance from it as the fountain-head. At the period of time in question the Post-office was situated in a central part of the town, the outside

of the building partaking of the ugly and old-fashioned style of the shops of that day. It was then considered quite sufficient for the business of the place that there should be a small room of about twenty feet square devoted to postal purposes; that there should be a long counter, upon which the letters might be stamped and charged, and a small set of letter-boxes for the sorting processes. Added, however, to the proper business of the neighbourhood, there used to be a kind of work done here which was confined to a few towns on the lines of mails, selected for this supplementary business on account of their central positions. The mail-coaches, as they passed and repassed northwards and southwards, stopped here for half an hour until certain necessary sorting operations could be performed with a portion of the letters. In this way our particular town held the style and designation, and with it the *prestige*, of a "Forwarding Office."

The public required little attention, and got but little. Being prior to the time of postage-stamps, and we may almost add of money-orders, not to speak of savings' bank business, few applications were ever made to the officers—consisting of a postmaster, his wife, and another clerk—for anything but stray scraps of information relative to the despatch of mails. The communication with the public was anything but close, being conducted in this town—and, in fact, in all others of our acquaintance—through a trap-door in a wooden pane in the office-window. Near to it was a huge slit, being a passage to a basket, into which letters and newspapers were promiscuously thrown. The principal labour incident to the old style of postage was in regulating the amount to be paid on the different letters. Those posted in the town for the town itself were delivered for a penny; twopence was charged into the country places surrounding: letters for the metropolis cost a shilling; and Scotch letters eightpence-halfpenny at least, the odd halfpenny being the charge as a toll for the letter crossing the Tweed. The delivery of the letters in the town took place at any time during the day, according to the arrival of the mails, and it was effected by a single letter-carrier.<sup>1</sup> Private boxes for

<sup>1</sup> As the letter-carriers were not employed by Government, curious practices prevailed among them; they seem, in fact, to have performed their duties pretty much as they chose. As a picture not at all uncommon of this class of

the principal merchants in the town, and private bags for the country gentlemen, were almost indispensable to those who cared for the proper despatch and security of their correspondence. Many gentlemen who did not arrange to have private bags (at a great yearly expense) were compelled to make frequent journeys to the town to ascertain if any letters had arrived for them. Some letters would remain at the Post-office for days and even weeks unknown to the persons to whom they were addressed, who would perhaps hear of the circumstance from some friend quite accidentally. Letter-delivering in the rural districts was then a private concern, and, in consequence, those letters destined for a particular road were laid aside till a sufficient number were accumulated to make it worth while to convey them at a charge of a penny a letter.<sup>1</sup> Owing to the wretched system, or rather want of system, in force, many country places round a post-office were, to all intents and purposes, more remote than most foreign countries are at this hour. One or two letter-carriers sufficing for the wants of the town, we need scarcely say that the number of letters received was exceedingly small. Now a single firm, or two at any rate, in the same town, will cause a greater amount of daily postal business in the letters received and despatched than the entire population of thirty or forty years ago.

Our purpose will not allow of our describing all the attendant circumstances of the state of things existing at this early period, or more fully than we have already done in the case of the old mail-guard and the mail-coach, the postal arrangements of the past. One word, however, of the "expresses" before we pass on. Designed to supply some sudden emergency, they were of

men and the style in which some of them performed their duties, a sentence from an autobiographical sketch of the period is most graphic: "One villainous old letter-carrier whom I remember was a drunken, surly, dishonest scoundrel, who used to carry the letters away from the office to a wretched den of his own where I sometimes saw him sorting them on the floor, while he growled and snarled over them like a dog over a heap of unsatisfactory bones."

<sup>1</sup> We still sometimes hear reports to the effect that deliveries in certain towns are not made unless there are a certain number of letters. Of course this is never so, but it reminds us of a (reported) postal regulation in a certain British dependency, where the postman (reputed to be a person of intelligence) always reads the letters committed to his care, and delivers them only *if important*; otherwise, it is said, he makes them wait for the following mail!

great use where quick intelligence was urgently required. For this purpose they might be had from the Post-office people at any hour, and generally they were procured through the night. A special mounted messenger might be despatched, under this arrangement, with the single letter, marked with the well-known "Haste! post haste!" and carrying with him a way-bill, to account for the time taken to perform the journey. The charge for expenses was at the rate of a shilling a mile, the speed at which they travelled averaging ten miles an hour.

Now this is changed, and almost all postal arrangements, prior to the days of Sir Rowland Hill, are as so many things of the past. The Post-office itself is metamorphosed into quite a grand establishment. This part, now dedicated to the public, might be part of a first-class banking establishment. Entering by a spacious doorway, there is ample accommodation for a score of people to stand in the ante-room and leisurely transact their business. Then there runs along the whole length of the first or public room a substantial mahogany counter, behind which the clerks stand to answer inquiries and attend to the ordinary daily business. There is a desk for the money-order clerk, and a drawer in which postage-stamps are kept. Close by we see one or two ranges of boxes; one for caller's letters—*poste restante*—and another for those who prefer to engage private boxes to having their letters delivered by the postmen. Outside, things are changed also. The wooden pane—nay, the window itself—has disappeared to make way for a more modern structure; and instead of the single letter-box, there are several. Late letters are now provided for in a private box, and so also are newspapers. The principal Post-office work is accomplished in an interior apartment, from which the public are studiously excluded, while the postmaster in our larger towns transacts his business in another separate apartment. Several large tables stand in the centre of the room, one of them well padded with leather is used specially for letter-stamping; a number of letter-benches—for boxes are not used much now—are arranged against three of the four walls and in the middle of the room, on which the letters and newspapers are sorted. Empty canvas bags of different sizes, with metal labels attached (if the name of the town is not *painted* on them), books, printed papers of

different kinds, bundles of string, &c. make up the furniture of the apartment, and complete the appearance of it immediately prior to the receipt of the early morning mail.

Long before the ordinary workmen in our towns are summoned from their repose, the Post-office work in the provinces may be said to commence by the mail-cart clattering through the now silent streets to the railway station, there to await the arrival of the first and principal mail and its first daily instalment of bags. At the given time, and only (even in the depth of winter) very occasionally late, the train emerges out of the darkness, its two shining lamps in front, into the silent and almost empty station. The process described in our account of the travelling post-office is here gone through ; a rapid exchange of bags is made, and each interest goes its separate and hurried way. During the interval, and just before the mail-cart deposits its contents at the door of the post-office, the clerks and letter-carriers will have been roused from their beds, and somewhat sulkily, perhaps, have found their places in time. They look sleepy and dull, but this is excusable : the hour is a drowsy one, and half the world is dozing. The well-known sound of the mail-cart breaks the spell, however, and soon they are all thoroughly alive, nay, even interested, in the duties in which they are engaged. The bags just arrived are immediately seized by one of their number, who hurriedly cuts their throats, and then empties the contents upon the huge table in a great heap : somewhere in the heap our letter is safely deposited. The bundles of letters are quickly taken to the letter-stampers, through whose hands they must first pass. With a speed and accuracy which rivals machinery,<sup>1</sup> an agile letter-stamper will soon impress a copy of the dated stamp of the office upon the back of a hundred letters, and this done, they are passed over to the clerks and sorters to arrange them in the different boxes, the process being repeated till the whole are disposed of. The newspapers are taken from the table without being stamped, and sorted by the letter-carriers. As soon as the first or preliminary sorting is over, each sorter will proceed upon distinctive duties ; some will prepare the letters for the letter-carriers, by

<sup>1</sup> Machines for letter-stamping have been in use for some time in London and Paris. They are not yet perfect enough for general use.

sorting each man's letters together, according to their different number. When this is done, the letters are handed to the carriers, who retire to a separate room, looking with its desks very like a small schoolroom, and there arrange them in order to deliver them from house to house. Other officers will prepare the letters for the sub-offices and rural messengers. When all the letters, &c. for a certain village are gathered up, they are counted and tied up in bundles; if any charged letters are sent, the amount is debited against the sub-postmaster of the place on a letter-bill—something like an invoice—which invariably accompanies every Post-office letter-bag despatched from one post-town to another, or from one head office to a sub-office. If any registered letters are of the number to be sent, the name of each addressee is carefully written on the letter-bill. Private and locked bags for the country gentry still survive, and may be obtained for an annual fee of one guinea. They are attended to with some care, and are carried to their destination with the other made-up bags. When the mails are ready, they are sent from the Post-office in various ways. Those for one or two country roads are sent to a local railway station, and taken in charge by the railway guard, who drops the bags at the different points on the line according to their address; others are carried by mail gigs under one or more private contractors, while the rest are taken by country-walking postmen, who make certain journeys during the day, returning in the evening with the letters and bags they have gathered during their travels. Of course the rural messengers take out loose letters as well; *e.g.* those for detached dwellings on their line of road. Our letter falls into the hands of one of those hard-working and deserving men.<sup>1</sup> The village, or rather hamlet, to which it is addressed is too small for a post-office, but a rural postman passes through

<sup>1</sup> It is generally allowed that the country postmen are, as a rule, such as we have described them. Edward Capern, the Wayside Poet, at the time a rural letter-carrier between Bideford and Buckland Brewer, Devonshire, walking thirteen miles a day, Sunday included, for 10s. 6d. a week, has described their life in the following poem:—

“O! the postman's is as blessed a life  
As any one's, I trow,  
If leaping the stile o'er many a mile  
Can blessedness bestow.

it on his daily journeyings about ten o'clock each morning, delivering with scrupulous fidelity everything committed to his care. Thus, posted where we saw it last night, it passes from hand to hand all through the long night, and eventually reaches

"If tearing your way through a tangled wood,  
Or dragging your limbs through a lawn;  
If wading knee-deep through an angry flood,  
Or a plough'd field newly sown,—

"If sweating big drops 'neath a burning sun,  
And shiv'ring 'mid sleet and snow;  
If drenched to the skin with rain, be fun,  
And can a joy bestow!

"If toiling away through a weary week  
(No six days' work but seven)  
Without one holy hour to seek  
A resting place in heaven:

"If hearing the bells ring Sabbath chimes,  
'To bid us all repair  
To church (as in the olden times)  
And bend the knee in prayer:

"If in these bells he hears a voice  
'To thy delivery!'  
God says to every soul 'rejoice,'  
But, postman, not to thee.

"O, the postman's is a blessed life!  
And sighing heavily,  
Ha, ha, he'll say, 'alack a-day!  
Where's Britain's piety?'

"Heigho! I come and go  
Through the muck and miry slough;  
Heigho! I come and go  
Heavy at heart and weary O!

"Heigho! Heigho!  
Does any one pray for the postman? No!  
No! no! no! no!  
Or he would not be robbed of his Sabbath so!"

In *The Rural Postman's Sabbath*, Capern seems to breathe a more contented strain. His poetical remonstrances, probably on account of their originality, were more successful than they might have been if given in prose. The authorities raised his salary, and relieved him of his Sunday labours. Few rural postmen now travel on Sundays. The post-postman has also had a pension granted him from the Royal Bounty Fund. In Capern's case we find literary abilities of a high order in the very lowest ranks of the Post-office. When we have mentioned the names of Mr. Anthony Trollope, Mr. Edmund Yates, and Mr. Frank Scudamore, we have said enough to show that they exist also in the highest ranks of the service. Of all these names, and their varied successes in literature, the Post-office has just reason to be very proud.



that hand for which it was intended 300 odd miles away, nearly as surely as if we had travelled to deliver it ourselves.

But to return. While some of the officers are attending in this way to the wants of the country, others are serving the interests of the town. A hundred or two gentlemen, bankers and manufacturers, pay an extra guinea yearly in order to secure certain special privileges at the Post-office. These privileges consist, in brief, of having their letters arranged in private boxes, each labelled with their names, and delivered from these boxes by one of the clerks as soon as the office is opened, or the moment the letter-carriers emerge from it to enter upon any of the daily deliveries of letters. Of course these letters must be prepared previously.

The office is open to the public for money-orders and for the transaction of the business of the new savings' banks at nine o'clock, and continues open on every day, except Saturdays, until six, on which day two hours longer are allowed. It is not necessary to describe the arrangements in these branches, seeing that the public are familiar from daily experience with them. It will suffice to say that separate clerks are usually delegated to these duties in our large towns, and are answerable to the postmaster for the correctness of their accounts. The same clerk attends to the sale of postage-stamps, keeping an account with the postmaster of the quantity *sold*, and also of the stamps *bought* from the public under the recent arrangement. In larger towns where one clerk is specially retained for these duties, he is known as the "window clerk," as it devolves upon him to answer all applications and inquiries.

Throughout the day, the quietness of the Post-office proper is broken in upon and varied by the arrival of some small mail. On one of these occasions, namely, on the receipt of the day-mail from London, the operations of the morning are gone over again on a small scale, and for a short time the office presents an appearance of some of its early bustle. Letters are delivered in the town, but those arriving for the country places remain at the office till the next morning.

The work of the Post-office commences before "grey dawn," and long before the usual period of ordinary business in our towns; it lasts also far into the "dewy eve." When merchants

lock up their desks and offices, and complete their last round of duties by posting their letters, the serious work of the Post-office for the second time during the day, may be said to begin. The hour before the despatch of the principal mail in any provincial Post-office, thanks in great part to the dilatoriness of the public in general, is an hour of busy activity, seldom witnessed in any other branch of industry whatever. Almost at the same moment the country mail-gigs from their different rides, mail-carts from the local railway stations, the rural postmen from their walks, and the receiving-house keepers from the outskirts of the town, approach the post-office door, and speedily cause the office to groan as it were under the weight of letters and bags. All the force of the office is now engaged, and engaged with a will, if the bags are to be ready for the London night-mail due from Scotland at the railway station in sixty minutes. Again, the same round of bag opening, checking, stamping (only now the stamps must be obliterated, as the letters are about to be despatched for the first time), and sorting, which we described in the morning, is again repeated. The sorted letters are examined, tied up in bundles of sixty or seventy each, and then despatched in the bags received at the beginning of the day from the London mail. The bags are tied, sealed, and hurried away to the station. Now, at length, the postmaster and his staff breathe freely. For a full hour they have been engaged as busily, yet as silently, as so many bees in a hive ; " but now that the work is finished, the thoughts of rogues, lovers, bankers, lawyers, clergymen, and shopkeepers ; the loves and griefs, the weal and woes, of the town and country lie side by side, and for a few hours at least will enjoy the most complete and secret companionship." Every working day, and to some extent on Sunday, the same routine of work is prescribed and accomplished with little variation.

In all this consists the *prose* of Post-office life, but who shall describe its *poetry* ? Scarcely a day passes in any of our provincial post-offices without some incident occurring calculated to surprise, amuse, or sadden. Very probably within a few minutes one will have come to make a complaint that a certain letter or letters ought to have arrived, and must have been kept back ;

another will make an equally unreasonable request, or propound some strange inquiry which the poor Post-office clerk is supposed to be omniscient enough to answer. Most often, however, the cases of inquiry disclose sorrowful facts, and all the consolation which can be offered—supposing that the clerk has any of “the milk of human kindness” in him, a quality of mind or heart, much too rare, we confess, in the Post-office service—will most likely be the consolation of hope. The official sees now and then brief snatches of romance; perhaps the beginning or the end, though seldom the transaction throughout. Amusing circumstances are often brought out by requests tendered at the Post-office, that letters which have been posted may be returned to the writers. A formal, but most essential rule, makes letters once posted the property of the Postmaster-General until they are delivered as addressed, and must not be given up to the *writers* on any pretence whatever. One or two requests of this kind related to us we are not likely soon to forget. On one occasion, a gentlemanly-looking commercial traveller called at an office and expressed a fear that he had enclosed two letters in wrong envelopes, the addresses of which he furnished. It appeared from the account which he reluctantly gave, after a refusal to grant his request, that his position and prospects depended upon his getting his letters, and correcting the mistakes, inasmuch as they revealed plans which he had adopted to serve two mercantile houses in the same line of business, whose interests clashed at every point. He failed to get his letters, but we hope he has retrieved himself, and is now serving one master faithfully.

Another case occurred in which a fast young gentleman confessed to carrying on a confidential correspondence with two young ladies at the same time, and that he had, or feared he had, crossed two letters which he had written at the same sitting. We heartily hope a full exposure followed. Writing of this, we are reminded of a case where a country postmaster had a letter put into his hand through the office window, together with the following message delivered with great emphasis: “Here’s a letter; she wants it to go along as fast as it can, ’cause there’s a feller wants to have her here, and she’s courted by another feller that’s not here, and she wants to know whether he is going to

have her or not." If the letter was as explicit as the verbal message to which the postmaster involuntarily lent his ear, no doubt the writer would not be long in suspense. These cases, however, are uninteresting compared to one related by another postmaster. A tradesman's daughter who had been for some time engaged to a prosperous young draper in a neighbouring town, heard from one whom she and her parents considered a creditable authority, that he was on the verge of bankruptcy. "Not a day was to be lost in breaking the bond by which she and her small fortune were linked to penury." A letter, strong and conclusive in its language, was at once written and posted, when the same informant called upon the young lady's friends to contradict and explain his previous statement, which had arisen out of some misunderstanding. "They rushed at once to the Post-office, and no words can describe the scene; the reiterated appeals, the tears, the wringing of hands, the united entreaties of father, mother, and daughter for the restoration of the fatal letter." But the rule admitted of no exception, and the young lady had to repent at leisure of her inordinate haste.

We have only space to close with a graphic extract from the reminiscences of a Post-office official, in which the every-day life of a country post-office is admirably described: "For the poor we were often persuaded both to read and write their letters; and the Irish especially, with whom penmanship was a rare accomplishment, seldom failed to succeed in their eloquent petitions; though no one can realize the difficulty of writing from a Paddy's dictation, where 'the pratees, and the pig, and the praiste, God bless him!' became involved in one long, perplexed sentence, without any period from beginning to end of the letter. One such epistle, the main topic of which was an extravagant lamentation over the death of a wife, rose to the pathetic climax, 'and now I'm obleeged to wash meself, and bake meself!'" The officers of the Dead-letter Office could a tale unfold, one would think, only an essential rule of the service binds them to honourable secrecy. The Post-office official often, however, and in spite of himself, learns more than he cares to know. "For," as the writer continues, "a great deal can be known from the outside of a letter, where there is no disposition to pry into the enclosure. Who would not be almost satisfied

with knowing all the correspondence coming to or leaving the hands of the object of his interest? From our long training among the letters of our district, we knew the handwriting of most persons so intimately, that no attempt at disguise, however cunningly executed, could succeed with us. We noticed the ominous lawyers' letters addressed to tradesmen whose circumstances were growing embarrassed; and we saw the carefully ill-written direction to the street in Liverpool and London, where some poor fugitive debtor was in hiding. The evangelical curate, who wrote in a disguised hand and under an assumed name to the fascinating public singer, did not deceive us; the young man who posted a circular love-letter to three or four girls the same night, never escaped our notice; the wary maiden, prudently keeping two strings to her bow, unconsciously depended upon our good faith. The public never know how much they owe to official secrecy and official honour, and how rarely this confidence is betrayed. Petty tricks and artifices, small dishonesties, histories of tyranny and suffering, exaggerations and disappointments were thrust upon our notice. As if we were the official confidants of the neighbourhood, we were acquainted with the leading events in the lives of most of the inhabitants."

Once more, "Never, surely, has any one a better chance of seeing himself as others see him than a country postmaster. Letters of complaint very securely enveloped and sealed passed through our hands, addressed to the Postmaster-General, and then came back to us for our own perusal and explanation. One of our neighbours informed the Postmaster-General, in confidence, that we were 'ignorant and stupid.' A clergyman<sup>1</sup> wrote a pathetic remonstrance, stating that he was so often disappointed of his *Morning Star and Dial*, that he had come

<sup>1</sup> It is matter of notoriety, furnishing a fruitful subject for reflection and comment, that, excepting newsagents complaining of newspapers, the great majority of complaints on miscellaneous matters reaching the Post-office authorities take their rise with *clergymen*. As offering a curious commentary on the Divine injunction to be merciful and to forgive "seventy times seven," we once saw a requisition (and we have since been informed that this is no uncommon occurrence) from a clergyman for the dismissal of a Post-office clerk—a man with a wife and several children—on the ground that he had twice caused his letters to be mis-sent, in each case losing the clerical correspondent a post!

to the conclusion that we disapproved of that paper for the clergy, and for scruples of conscience, or political motives, prevented it—one of 400 passing daily through our office—from reaching his hands whenever there was anything we considered objectionable in it.”

## CHAPTER III.

ON POSTAGE-STAMPS.<sup>1</sup>

THE history of the postage-stamp presents very many interesting and remarkable features. First used, as many of our readers will remember, in May, 1840, it has only just passed out of its years of minority, and yet, at this present moment, there are about three thousand different varieties of the species in existence, and the number is increasing every month. Not only has it penetrated into every civilized nation under heaven, and some semi-barbarous countries, and even into the Ottoman Empire—where, strange as it may appear when viewed in the light of Mohammedan usage, the Sultan has allowed his portrait to appear on the new issues of Turkish stamps—but the system of prepayment, of which it may be deemed the visible expression, is bringing it into use in our own and other countries as a medium for railway and other carriers, and this to such an extent that ere long it may come to lose its normal significance. The question as to who invented the first plans for *prepayment* of letters or newspapers, and the material for that prepayment, would not be easily settled. As to who invented the *postage-stamp*, as a medium for prepayment of letters, there cannot now be much doubt. Post-paid envelopes were in use in France as early as the reign of Louis XIV.<sup>2</sup> Pelisson states that they originated in 1653, with a M. de Velay, who established, under royal authority, a private post in Paris, placing boxes at

<sup>1</sup> We regret that in the first edition of this work we have been led into several inaccuracies both as regards the history of the stamp, and its present manufacture. Through the kindness of Sir Rowland Hill we have been directed to sources of additional information which place the correctness of the facts of this re-written chapter beyond reasonable question; while, thanks to one of his nephews, Mr. Ormond Hill, the Assistant Controller of the Stamp-office, we have been enabled to witness the operation of stamp-making, and to have the benefit of his clear and interesting explanations.

<sup>2</sup> Fournier.

the corners of the streets for the reception of letters, which were to be wrapped up in certain *envelopes*. These envelopes, some of which are still extant, had no device or design upon them, but simply some printed instructions.<sup>1</sup> Shopkeepers in the immediate neighbourhood sold the envelopes at the price of one sou. The envelopes or tickets were attached to the letters, or wrapped round them in such a manner that the postman could remove and retain them on delivering the letters.

In England, the first proposals for a kind of stamp or stamped cover were made in relation to newspapers. On June 20th, 1836, Mr. Spring Rice (now Lord Monteagle) proposed the reduction of the stamp duty on newspapers from fourpence to one penny. It was strenuously opposed by the Opposition, many arguments, especially one that the Post-office work would be so increased that it could not be accomplished, being advanced by the Tory party. In one of the previous discussions, viz. May, 1834, Mr. Mathew D. Hill, then member for Hull, referred to a proposal made to Lord Althorp by Mr. Charles Knight, where he suggested that the new postage on newspapers might be collected by selling stamped wrappers at one penny each. Mr. Charles Whiting seems to have made a somewhat similar suggestion before the reduction of the rate for newspapers.<sup>2</sup> Mr. Whiting, according to Mr. W. H. Ashurst,<sup>3</sup> made his proposal for the stamped envelopes or "go frees," in order to defeat the then too common system of evasion in the manner of addressing the newspapers, where all kinds of changes were rung in the words constituting the address.<sup>4</sup> Mr. Whiting's proposals were never taken up. Mr. Knight's fared somewhat better, though not in the way he intended. Mr. Hill determined to turn his proposal to account in the development of his plans. Mr. Hill had decided for prepayment of letters as one of the main features of his new scheme, and although money payments

<sup>1</sup> This simple expedient is doubtless what Mr. Smiles refers to in one of his admirable books, *Industrial Biography*, p. 177: "Even the invention of the penny-postage system," says Mr. Smiles, "by Sir Rowland Hill is disputed . . . a French writer alleging it to be an old French invention." Surely, Mr. Smiles might have soon learnt that the "penny-postage system," and the system of prepayment, or even the invention of the postage stamp are vastly different things.

<sup>2</sup> *Report of Select Committee of Postage*, vol. iv. p. 391.

<sup>3</sup> *Facts &c. in support of Mr. Hill's Plan*, p. 40. Note.

<sup>4</sup> *Vide London and Westminster Review*, 1835.



over the counter were first proposed, he afterwards came to the conclusion that a kind of stamp or stamped cover for letters, such as had been proposed for newspapers, would much better serve the purposes of the public and the Post-office. Mr. Hill carefully elaborated the details of the proposal before the Commissioners of Post-office Inquiry in 1837, and a careful perusal of their *Ninth Report* will satisfy any reasonable mind as to the fact of the first suggestion of the postage-stamp. There Mr. Hill in plain and unmistakable language<sup>1</sup> not only speaks of its practicability as a means of prepayment, but says how it may be manufactured, even to the gumming, and its position on the envelope. Mr. Hill's own account before the Commissioners of the origin of the suggestion is quite decisive of itself. It is satisfactory, however, to find that Mr. Charles Knight now gives in his recent interesting work<sup>2</sup> an account identical with that alluded to. After referring to Mr. Knight's proposal, Mr. Hill went on to say, "availing myself of this excellent suggestion, I propose the following arrangement :—

(1) That stamped covers or sheets of paper, or small vignette stamps—the latter, if used, to be gummed on the face of the letter—to be supplied to the public from the stamp-office, and sold at such a price as to include the postage. Letters so stamped to be treated in all respects as franks.

(2) That as covers at various prices would be required for packets of various weights, each should have the weight it is entitled to carry legibly printed with the stamp.

(3) That the stamp of the receiving-house should be struck upon the superscription or duty stamp, to prevent the latter being used a second time.

(4) The vignette stamps being portable, persons could carry them in their pocket-books."

These were the principal features and the most striking parts of the new plan. We have seen in an earlier stage of this volume how the Commissioners of Post-office Inquiry, and also the Committee of Postage of 1837-8, had the matter under their consideration, and how both the boards came to a favourable resolution on the subject. When the Government brought in

<sup>1</sup> *Ninth Report*, p. 33. Dr. J. E. Gray, of the British Museum, has of late claimed the credit of having suggested that letters should be prepaid with stamps as early as 1834. His claims cannot be substantiated on documentary evidence, and therefore rest on no such solid foundation as those of Sir Rowland Hill.

<sup>2</sup> *Autobiography of a Working Life*, vol. ii. p. 249.

and carried the Penny Postage Act, a clause for their use formed a component part of it.

Though it was agreed on all hands that stamps, or stamped paper of some sort, should come into use with the advent of cheap postage, it was by no means easy to hit upon a definite plan, or when a number of plans were submitted to decide upon the particular ones to be adopted. Stamped *paper* representing different charges was first suggested. Folded in a particular way, a simple revenue stamp would then be exposed to view, and frank the letter. Stamped paper met with its advocates in the mercantile and legal world, and, on account of the body of the letter being in the case of envelopes separate from the address, and there being thus no proof of the letter having been written to the person professing to receive it, it was, and is still in some quarters, made a point of legal consequence that nothing but a sheet of paper shall be used. Another suggestion was that a stamped *wafer*, as it was called, should be used, and, placed on the back of a letter, seal and frank it at the same time. One gentleman went to the extent of taking out a patent for a stamped wafer, under the title of "Bogardus's improved means of applying labels, stamps, or marks to letters, &c."<sup>1</sup> The idea of stamped *envelopes*, however, was at first by far the most popular, and some argued that they should form the only prepaying medium. Mr. Dickenson, the paper maker, for instance, wanted nothing but stamped envelopes, and he attacked at great length both stamped letter-paper and adhesive stamps.<sup>2</sup> It was eventually decided that the postage-stamp and the stamped envelope should both be used ; and plans and suggestions for the carrying out of the arrangement being required, so that the Government might have all the details of the new plan ready by the close of the year, the Lords of the Treasury issued a proclamation, dated August 23d, 1839, inviting "all artists, men of science, and the public in general," to offer proposals "as to the manner in which the stamp may best be brought into use." So important was the subject considered, that Lord Palmerston, the then Foreign Secretary, apprised foreign Governments of the matter, and invited suggestions from any part of the civilized world. Three

<sup>1</sup> *Specification of Patents*, 26th Aug. 1839, No. 8208.

<sup>2</sup> *Ninth Report*, 1837.

months were allowed for plans, and two prizes of 200*l.* and 100*l.* were offered for proposals on the subject, "which my lords may think most deserving of attention." The response was ample. Nearly three thousand plans for the two objects were sent to the Treasury. For the envelopes the design sent in by the late Mr. Mulready, Royal Academician, was chosen. The design was engraved in wood by Mr. John Thomson.<sup>1</sup> Mulready's envelopes, which allegorically celebrated the triumphs of the post in a host of emblematical figures, were of two colours, the one for a penny being printed in black, and the other, for the twopenny postage, in blue ink. They gave little satisfaction, however, and at the end of six months were withdrawn from use. There was little room left on the envelope for the address. They left to the common and vulgar gaze, as Miss Martineau, we believe, points out, emotions of the mind which had always best be kept in the background; and instead "of spreading a taste for high art," which had been hoped, they brought it into considerable ridicule.<sup>2</sup>

The postage-stamp, though it has passed through many transformations, has had a different history, and turned out a most decided success. More than a thousand designs were offered, the conditions being that it should be simple, handy, and easily placed upon paper, and of such a nature as would make forgery difficult, if not impossible. The original stamp was designed by Messrs. Bacon and Petch, and was engraved on a steel die by Mr. Charles Heath.<sup>3</sup> The portrait of the queen is said to have been taken from Wyon's City Medal by a drawing by Mr. Henry Corbould. The stamp was at first printed in black, but two years afterwards the colour was changed to brown, princi-

<sup>1</sup> "Mulready's original design," says Mr. Burn, in the *Stamp Collector's Magazine* for June, 1864, "a pencilled outline drawing, with an impression from Thomson's wood block, sold at the artist's sale on the 28th April, 1864, for twenty guineas."

<sup>2</sup> The Mulready envelopes are now regarded as great curiosities by stamp collectors, and as their value had risen during the past few years to as high as fifteen shillings, a spurious imitation soon found its way into the market, usually to be had at half a crown. In 1862, stamp dealers were shocked by the Vandalism of the Government, who caused, it is said, many thousands of these envelopes to be destroyed at Somerset House. We do not vouch, however, for the truth of the report.

<sup>3</sup> Committee of Inquiry (Archer's) 1852. *Minutes of Evidence*, 1007-S, 1692. From this die—which cost sixty guineas—all the plates used subsequently for penny stamps have been derived.

pally with a view to make the obliterating process more perfect, and the better to detect the dishonest practices of those who used old stamps. For the same reason, mainly, the colour was soon afterwards changed to red, and so it has remained to the present time. The twopenny stamp has been from the first blue. The contract for printing and supplying sufficient quantities of the penny and twopenny stamps was made in 1840 with the gentlemen who had originally designed them. On the 13th of April, 1840, Messrs. Bacon and Petch contracted for one year to print the stamps in sheets, each containing 240 stamps, and also to gum them on the back, for the sum of sevenpence-half-penny per thousand stamps. This firm, now Messrs. Perkins, Bacon, and Co. has had the contract ever since up to the present time, every year producing a greater number of stamps. In 1851, Mr. Archer offering to print, gum, and *perforate* all the stamps required at fivepence per thousand stamps, Messrs. Bacon and Petch lowered their price to that sum, obtaining a five years' contract, and we believe this is the basis of the existing engagement.

Mr. Archer offered to furnish the stamps at a still cheaper rate if the Government would allow him to print them on the surface principle—which has been adopted from the first in France and Belgium—instead of copper-plate engraving. This offer was not accepted, and the principle is unchanged as regards the cheaper kind of stamps. This leads us, however, to speak of the other English stamps, which at different intervals have been produced. Up to this date six higher-priced stamps have been issued, as the necessities of the inland or foreign postage required them. The tenpenny stamp, of an octagonal shape and brown colour, is now scarcely ever used. The other five issues comprise the sixpenny (lilac), the shilling (green), the fourpenny (vermilion), the threepenny (rose), and the ninepenny (yellow). The last two were issued only three or four years ago. The whole of these stamps are supplied by Messrs De la Rue and Co. under contract to the Government, as in the case of Messrs. Perkins, Bacon, and Co.,<sup>1</sup> but they are all printed on the cheaper and simpler principle of surface printing. The whole of the

<sup>1</sup> These firms are also the principal houses for the manufacture of colonial stamps.

English labels bear the impression of the head of our Queen,<sup>1</sup> and are all of the same size and shape (if we except the ten-penny stamp), the sole difference being in the colour, and in the various borderings round Her Majesty's very untrue portrait. Besides these distinguishing marks, however, they all tell the tale of their own value.

Though the Mulready envelopes were condemned, others of a simpler appearance, though difficult manufacture, were brought into use. On the right-hand corner of a common envelope a stamp was embossed by the Government authorities, the shape oval or round, and differently coloured according to the value of the envelope, and this, passed through the post, served the same purposes as the postage-stamp.<sup>2</sup> For the envelopes themselves a peculiar kind of paper, which attracted considerable attention at the time, was prepared by Mr. Dickenson, and was considered on all hands as a complete preventative against forgery. This paper, which was manufactured with lines of thread or silk stretched through its substance, was discontinued some years ago as unnecessary. The penny-stamped envelopes, convenient and handy as they are, are scarcely used so much as it was expected they would be—the demand for them varying very little year by year. The manufacture of the twopenny envelopes are almost entirely, if not quite, discontinued. The stamps themselves are embossed on the envelopes at Somerset House, but all the other operations connected with their manufacture are performed under contract by Messrs. De la Rue, and Co. The paper, for instance, is cut into proper shapes by this firm, sent to the Stamp Department to be ornamented with an impression of the Queen's head, and then returned to the contractors to be folded and gummed. The envelopes are finally returned to Somerset House in packets ready for distribution to the public.

The Stamp Department of Somerset House affords every

<sup>1</sup> Some of our colonies adopt different designs, but they are all gradually adopting the English plan of a simple profile of the sovereign. The portrait of our Queen appears on two hundred and fifty varieties of stamps.

<sup>2</sup> Again the legal argument was used, which led to half sheets of paper (made on the same principle as the envelopes) being issued with the stamp at one corner. Directions were given as to the folding of the paper. It was only, however, after great trouble that the paper could be properly folded so as to show the stamp.

facility in the matter of stamped paper and envelopes, and private individuals may indulge their tastes to almost any extent. An embossed stamp will be placed on any paper or envelope, or any number of them, that may be forwarded, provided that certain well-defined regulations be attended to. These regulations may be learnt either at the Post-office or Stamp-office, or by consulting the *British Postal Guide*. Nine persons or trading firms have chosen to have their names or designations printed round the embossed stamp, as a border to it. This is supposed to serve as an advertisement.

For a number of years the stamps had to be separated from each other in the sheet by knives or scissors, and the difficulty and annoyance of this arrangement will be remembered by most readers. Hence arose the proposal for a perforating machine, originally made by Mr. Henry Archer. Mr. Archer, who was an Irishman, and who had previously been managing director of a railway in Wales, proposed a machine in 1847 to the Marquis of Clanricarde, then Postmaster-General, which the former thought might be made to pierce the sheet of stamps with holes, so that each stamp might be torn apart. Meeting with encouragement from the Post-office, Archer had a machine constructed, but it was not successful, till, in his third attempt, he contrived to make his machine *punch out* the globules or pieces of paper round each stamp. The Lords of the Treasury thereupon offered Archer some remuneration for his invention, but it seems to have been so inadequate, even to reimburse him of his expenses, that he refused it, and soon afterwards appealed to the House of Commons. Mr. Muntz, the then member for Birmingham, took up Archer's case very warmly, and the result was the appointment of a Committee to investigate it, as well as an offer made by Archer to print the stamps on the *surface* principle. The Committee, over which Mr. Muntz was appointed chairman, consisted of Mr. Spooner, Mr. Gore, Mr. Geach, Mr. Hodgson, Mr. Grogan, Mr. Rich, Mr. Drummond, Mr. J. Greene, Sir John Tyrrell, and the Marquis of Chandos. The Committee sat during the months of March and April, 1852, and in their deliberations, which are printed, any one interested in the question of postage-stamps will find much information of great value and interest.<sup>1</sup> In pursuance of a recommendation from

<sup>1</sup> *Committee on Mr. Archer's claims, 1852.*

this Committee, Mr. Archer's machine, which he had patented, was purchased from him for the sum of 4,000*l*.<sup>1</sup> The patent itself was sufficiently cheap, not so much for the intrinsic value of the machine as for that to which it led. It was found nearly unworkable in practice, but the improvements brought about in the original by Mr. Edwin Hill, the controller of the Stamp Department—who, in conjunction with his son, has produced nearly all the machines in use for different purposes in that busy hive of industry—have made it answer all present requirements.<sup>2</sup> The same Committee could not decide, they said, on "the conflicting evidence," whether copper-plate engraving or surface printing would best secure the stamps against forgery, but they considered that the application of the skilful and ingenious perforating machine would do much to prevent forgery, whichever system was used, "inasmuch as it would be exceedingly difficult to counterfeit the sheets, and sheets badly done would at once excite suspicion when offered for sale."

The perforation of the sheets of stamps is the last process undergone before they are ready for sale. All the different kinds of stamps are perforated at the Stamp-office, whether printed at De la Rue's or Perkins and Co.'s. The embossing of stamps on paper intended for envelopes, and impressing the newspaper stamp on the tons of blank newspaper paper sent in from the different publishers, form the bulk of the stamping processes done at Somerset House. The entire establishment, which is a separate branch of the Inland Revenue Department, is partly kept up by the Post-office, which contributes about 30,000*l*. a year to the expenses of management.

With regard to the different processes through which the ordinary penny stamp passes in its manufacture, little is known out of the workshops, and for obvious reasons, it has never been thought desirable to publish any detailed account of their manufacture. Of course, much can be gathered from a minute inspection of a sheet of stamps. In addition, we may say simply, that about twenty presses, worked by a high class of workmen, are kept constantly going to provide postage stamps enough for the require-

<sup>1</sup> *Abstract of Grants for Miscellaneous Services.* Sums voted in supply from 1835 to 1863, moved for by Sir H. Willoughby.

<sup>2</sup> Archer's own machine has been laid aside for several years. Mr. Archer died at Pau, France, April 2d, 1863.

ments of the age. The paper upon which the stamps are printed is of a peculiar make,—manufactured, we believe, in Northamptonshire,—each sheet having a watermark of two hundred and forty crowns, or one for each stamp of the sheet. The sheet after being damped is fixed with minute accuracy to the copper-plate, which is then inked by rollers as in letter-press printing. The plates themselves are engraved with great care, by transferring from the original die as a parent source ; some figures are afterwards engraved on the plates by hand. The ink, of a peculiar red colour (made by the firm themselves for the purpose), is made to fill the interstices in the plate by being rubbed smoothly over its surface ; and this process, of course, gives the well-known colour to the sheet of penny stamps. After the sheets are pressed and dried, they are carefully gummed, and sent to Somerset House. We may here just add, that the adhesive matter with which the back of the stamp is covered is most harmless in its nature, and the stamp may be affixed to the letter in any way the writer chooses without the most remote fear of the consequences. The two ingredients used for the purpose are of the most simple and even nutritious character.

Great precaution is taken, in all the different stages of the manufacture of the stamp, to provide against forgery. All the lines and marks—and there are more marks about the stamp than the casual observer is likely to see—the beautiful engine-turned border, as well as the initial letters in the corner, are arranged so as to make the whole affair inimitable. The best preservative, however, in our opinion, against a spurious article, is the arrangement under which stamps are sold. Only obtainable in any large quantity from the Stamp or Post-offices, any attempt on the part of the forger to put a base article into circulation is encumbered with difficulties. Stamps, while they do duty for coin, are used almost exclusively for small transactions, and generally among people well known to each other. Other precautions are, nevertheless, very necessary ; and besides the initial letters on each stamp—different in every one of the two hundred and forty in the sheet—which are regarded as so many checks on the forger, this pest to society would have to engrave his own die, and cast his own blocks, and find a drilling-machine, perhaps the most difficult undertaking of all. The



paper, besides, would be a considerable obstacle, and not less so the ink, for that used in this manufacture differs from ordinary printer's ink, not merely in colour, but in being soluble in water.

When postage-stamps were first introduced in England, it was little thought that they would become a medium of exchange, and far less that they would excite such a *furor* among stamp collectors. The same stamp may do duty in a number of various ways before it serves its normal purpose. It may have proceeded through the post a dozen times imbedded within the folds of a letter, before it becomes affixed to one, and gets its career ended by an ugly knock on the face—for its countenance once disfigured, it has run its course. Besides their being so handy in paying a trifling debt or going on a merciful errand, the advertising columns of any newspaper will show the reader many of the thousand and one ways in which he may turn his spare postage stamps to account. You may suddenly fall upon a promise of an easy competence for the insignificant acknowledgment of half-a-crown's worth of this article. Friends to humanity assure you a prompt remittance of thirteen Queen's heads will secure you perfect exemption from all the ills that flesh is heir to. For the same quantity another, who does the prophetic strain, will tell you which horse will win the Derby, "as surely as if you stood at the winning-post on the very day." "Stable Boy," promises all subscribers of twelve stamps that if they "do not win on this event, he will never put his name in print again." Of course all this is quackery, or worse; still the reader need not be told how in innumerable *bond fide* cases the system of postage-stamp remittances is exceedingly handy for both buyer and vendor, and how trade—retail at any rate—is fostered by it. As a social arrangement, for the poorer classes especially, we could not well over-estimate its usefulness. Again we see a good result of the penny-post scheme. Since 1840, not only has the use of postage-stamps in this way never been discouraged (as it was always thought that fewer coin letters would be sent in consequence), but the Post-office authorities have recently made provision for taking them from the public, when not soiled, or not presented in single stamps. In America, as will be familiar to most readers, postage-stamps have formed

the principal currency of small value almost since the breaking out of the present fratricidal war. More recently, the United States Government has issued the stamps without gum, as it was found inconvenient to pass them frequently from hand to hand after they had undergone the gelatinizing process. Under an Act, "Postage Currency, July 17th, 1862," the Federal authorities have issued stamps printed on larger sized paper, with directions for their use under the peculiar circumstances.

The obliteration of postage-labels in their passage through the post requires a passing notice. Different countries obliterate their stamps variously, and with different objects. In France they obliterate with a hand-stamp having acute prominences in it, which, when thrown on the stamp, not only disfigures, but perforates it with numerous dots placed closely together. In Holland, the word "*Franco*" is imprinted in large letters. Some countries, *e.g.* Italy, Austria, and Prussia, mark, on the label itself, the name of the despatching town, together with the date of despatch. In England, the purpose of the defacement marks is *primarily* to prevent the stamp being used again. It also serves to show—inasmuch as the obliterating stamp of every British Post-office is consecutively numbered—where the letter was posted, in the event of the other dated stamp being imperfectly impressed. The mark of St. Martin's-le-Grand is a changeable figure in a circle, according to the time of day during which the letter has been posted and struck; for the London district offices we have the initials of the district, and the number of the office given in an oval. The figures in England are surrounded by lines forming a circle; in Scotland by three lines at the top and three at the bottom of them; in Ireland the lines surround the figures of the particular office in a diamond shape.

It only remains to refer for a moment to the *timbromanie*, or stamp mania. The scenes in Birchin Lane in 1862, where crowds nightly congregated, to the exceeding annoyance and wonder of the uninitiated—where ladies and gentlemen of all ages and all ranks, from Cabinet-ministers to crossing-sweepers, were busy, with album or portfolio in hand, buying, selling, or exchanging, are now known to have been the beginnings of what may almost be termed a new trade. Postage-stamp exchanges are

now common enough ; one held in Lombard Street on Saturday afternoons is, or was, largely attended. Looking the other day in the advertisement pages of a monthly magazine, we counted no fewer than sixty different dealers in postage-stamps there advertising their wares. Two years ago, there was no regular mart in London at which foreign stamps might be bought ; now there are dozens of regular dealers in the metropolis, who are doing a profitable trade. About three years ago, we witnessed the establishment of a monthly organ for the trade in the *Stamp-collector's Magazine* ; at this present moment there are no less than seven such publications in existence in the United Kingdom. England is not the only country interested in stamp-collecting. As might be expected, the custom originated in France, and has prevailed there for a number of years. In the gardens of the Tuileries, and also to some extent in those of the Luxembourg, crowds still gather, principally on Sunday afternoons, and may be seen sitting under the trees, sometimes in a state of great excitement, as they busily sell or exchange any of their surplus stock for some of which they may have been in search. The gathering of a complete set of postage-stamps, and a proper arrangement of them, is at least a harmless and innocent amusement. On this point, however, we prefer, in conclusion, to let Dr. Gray, of the British Museum, speak,<sup>1</sup> and our readers to judge for themselves. "The use and charm of collecting any kind of object is to educate the mind and the eye to careful observation, accurate comparison, and just reasoning on the differences and likenesses which they present, and to interest the collector in the design or art shown in their creation or manufacture, and the history of the country which produces or uses the objects collected. The postage-stamps afford good objects for all these branches of study, as they are sufficiently different to present broad outlines for their classification ; and yet some of the variations are so slight, that they require minute examination and comparison to prevent them from being overlooked. The fact of obtaining stamps from so many countries, suggests to ask what were the circumstances that induced the adoption, the history of the countries which issue them, and the understanding why some countries (like France) have considered

<sup>1</sup> *Hand Catalogue of Postage-Stamps*, Introduction, p. 5.

it necessary, in so few years, to make so many changes in the form or design of the stamp used ; while other countries, like Holland, have never made the slightest change.

“The changes referred to all mark some historical event of importance—such as the accession of a new king, a change in the form of government, or the absorption of some smaller state into some larger one ; a change in the currency, or some other revolution. Hence a collection of postage-stamps may be considered, like a collection of coins, an epitome of the history of Europe and America for the last quarter of a century ; and at the same time, as they exhibit much variation in design and in execution, as a collection of works of art on a small scale, showing the style of art of the countries that issue them, while the size of the collection, and the number in which they are arranged and kept, will show the industry, taste, and neatness of the collector.”



## CHAPTER IV.

POST-OFFICE SAVINGS' BANKS, AND GOVERNMENT INSURANCES  
AND ANNUITIES.

THE idea of Savings' Banks for the industrial classes was first started at the commencement of the present century. They are said to owe their origin to the Rev. Joseph Smith, of Wendover, who in 1799 circulated proposals among his poorer parishioners to receive any of their spare sums during the summer, and return the amounts at the Christmas following. To the original sum, Mr. Smith proposed to add one-third of the whole amount, as a reward for the forethought of the depositor. This rate of interest, ruinous to the projector, proves that the transactions must have been of small extent, and charity a large element in the work. The first savings' bank really answering to the name was established at Tottenham, Middlesex, in 1804, by some benevolent people in the place, and called the Charitable Bank. Five per cent. interest was allowed to depositors, though for many years this rate was a great drain on the benevolence of the founders. In 1817, these banks had increased in England and Wales to the number of seventy-four. During that year Acts of Parliament were passed offering every encouragement to such institutions, and making arrangements to take all moneys deposited, and place them in the public funds. From 1804 to 1861, the savings' banks of the United Kingdom increased to 638.

A reference to the various deficiencies of the old banks for savings, and the steps which led to the formation of those now under consideration, will not be out of place here. We have said that, in the early part of this century, successive Governments offered every inducement and facility to the savings' bank scheme. Such encouragement was indispensable to their success. When first started, Government granted interest to the trustees at the rate of  $4\frac{1}{2}$ l. per cent. This rate, reduced to 4l. as the

banks became more established, now stands at 3*l.* 5*s.* per cent. Of this sum depositors receive 3*l.* per cent. ; the difference paying the expenses of management. The encouragement which the Legislature has given to the savings' banks of the country since their commencement, has entailed a loss of about four and a half millions sterling on the public exchequer. From 1817 to 1841, a loss of nearly two millions sterling had been incurred, by reason of the rate of interest which was allowed by Government being greater than that yielded by the securities in which the deposits had been invested.

Savings' banks have suffered most severely from frauds in the management, and the feeling of insecurity which these frauds have engendered from time to time has gone far to mar their usefulness. Government is only responsible to the trustees for the amounts actually placed in its hands. The law, previous to 1844, gave the depositor a remedy against the trustees in case of wilful neglect or default. In 1844, the Legislature thought right to make a most important change in the law, by which trustees of savings' banks were released from all liability, except *where it was voluntarily assumed*. It remains a most significant fact, that all the great frauds with this class of banks have occurred since that date. We have, indeed, to thank only the influential gentlemen, who, as a rule, take upon themselves the management of savings' banks, that such cases have been so rare as they have.<sup>1</sup> The known frauds in savings' banks are calculated to have swallowed up a quarter of a million of hard-earned money. The fraud in the Cuffe Street bank in Dublin amounted to 56,000*l.* ; the Tralee bank stopped payment in 1848 with liabilities to depositors to the extent of 36,768*l.* and only 1,660*l.* of available assets ; in the same year, the Killarney savings' bank stopped with liabilities of 36,000*l.* and assets of only half that amount. About the same time, the Rochdale bank frauds became known, and losses to the extent of 40,000*l.* were the result.

There can be no doubt that the state of the law is still most

<sup>1</sup> The case of a fraud of this kind was mentioned by Lord Monteagle when the Post-office Savings' Bank Bill was before the Lords. In a Hertfordshire savings' bank, a deficiency of 10,000*l.* was discovered, and the entire amount was subscribed by nine of the trustees, who were noblemen and gentlemen in the neighbourhood.

anomalous, and that the great majority of the people of this country are under the impression that there is Government security for each deposit in every savings' bank. Year by year, changes have been proposed in the Legislature for giving more security to depositors, but the body of managers have hitherto been successful in their opposition. Whilst legislation is thus deferred, the risks to the provident poor still continue. In the report of a Government Commission appointed during one of these annual discussions "on the savings of the middle and working classes," several well-known authorities in such matters, such as Mr. J. Stuart Mill, and Mr. Bellenden Kerr, expressed decided opinions of the insecurity of savings' bank deposits. Mr. J. Malcolm Ludlow spoke to the feeling of the working-classes themselves: "I should say the *great* reason why the working-classes turn away from savings' banks, is the feeling of insecurity so largely prevailing amongst them."

Mr. J. S. Mill, when asked for any suggestion on the subject, said: "I think it would be very useful to provide some scheme to make the nation responsible for all amounts deposited. Certainly the general opinion among the depositors is, that the nation is responsible; they are not aware that they have only the responsibility of the trustees to rely upon."

Some change, or some new system, had long been regarded as absolutely necessary. In 1861, the number of savings' banks on the old plan was 638; yet out of this number there were no less than fourteen counties in the United Kingdom without a bank at all. Even in England, when the test was applied to *towns*, all, for instance, containing upwards of 10,000 inhabitants, it was found that there were one hundred and fifty without savings' bank accommodation of any sort. Nor was this all. Even where savings' banks already existed, 355 were open only once a week, and that for a few hours; some twice a week; 54 once a fortnight; but very few—only twenty, in fact—were open for a few hours every day. When, added to this want of accommodation and absence of facility, we remember the unsatisfactory state of the law concerning them, there can be no wonder that public attention was drawn to the subject from time to time. So early as 1807, Mr. Whitbread introduced a Bill into the House of Commons to make the Money-order office

at the Post-office available for collecting sums from all parts of the kingdom, and transmitting them to a central bank, which should be established in London. It is curious to find that Mr. Whitbread's proposals included also the establishment of a Government Assurance Office on the same basis, and to be worked in the same way. At that time, however, the Money-order department of the Post-office had not arrived at the state of efficiency to which it subsequently attained, and for this, or some other equally valid reason, the Bill was withdrawn. Twenty years afterwards, a writer in the *Quarterly Review*, an organ which has never been prominent in initiating great reforms, took up Mr. Whitbread's suggestions, and turned them to account in an article on the substitution of savings' banks for poor-laws.<sup>1</sup> The principle advocated was that masters should compulsorily deduct payments from the wages of their servants, and put them into a national savings' bank. "Perhaps these remittances," says the writer, "might, especially in rural districts, be allowed to be paid into the nearest Post-office, and remitted with its own money to the General Post-office, by whom it might be paid over to the Commissioners of the National Debt." All proposals of the kind shared an equal fate till the matter was seized upon by Mr. Gladstone, and carried by the aid of his ingenuity and eloquence to a successful issue. In 1860, Mr. Sykes, of Huddersfield, addressed the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the deficiencies of the existing system. Through his practical acquaintance with the old plan of working, he was able to demonstrate that increased facilities for depositing at any time, and in convenient places, were great desiderata amongst the poorer classes. The same facilities were necessary for withdrawing deposits. Mr. Sykes proposed that a bank for savings should be opened at every Money-order office in the kingdom; that each postmaster should be authorized to receive deposits; and that all the offices should have immediate connexion with a central bank in London. The general principle of this scheme was seen to be useful and practicable, and it was referred to the Post-office authorities. Some of Mr. Sykes's proposals for working the scheme were at once seen to be unsatisfactory. He proposed that all payments and

<sup>1</sup> *Quarterly Review*, October 1827, p. 489.



withdrawals should be severally effected by means of money-orders, to be drawn for each separate undertaking; but the difficulties which presented themselves in the complexity and confusion of such an arrangement promised to be insurmountable. Mr. Sykes proposed that no deposit should be less in amount than twenty shillings. This arrangement, again, would have gone far to negative the merits of the whole plan, and especially to interfere with its usefulness amongst the classes which the measure was really intended to benefit. After considerable discussion as to the details, the matter was finally settled towards the end of 1860, and the simple and comprehensive scheme which Mr. Gladstone proposed in 1861, and which was the crowning effort of the legislative session of that year, was the result. We are not left in doubt as to the hands which framed this important and beneficent measure, and which we venture to predict will rank in coming times only next in importance to that of uniform penny postage. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, whose convincing eloquence did so much for the measure in its passage through Parliament, on a subsequent occasion in the House of Commons gave up all claim to having arranged the scheme, and eulogized in highly complimentary terms the actual workers, mentioning Mr. Chetwynd, who was the first controller of the new department, Sir Alexander Spearman, of the National Debt Office, but more especially, and most warmly, Mr. Scudamore, who succeeded to the office of Assistant Secretary to the Post-office on the resignation of Sir Rowland Hill.

The Bill entitled, "An Act to grant additional facilities for depositing small savings at interest, with the security of Government for the due repayment thereof," became law on the 17th of May, 1861.

The first postal banks were established on the 16th of September, 1861. A limited number was first organized, in places where no accommodation of the kind had previously been afforded. The extension of the scheme to Ireland and Scotland was effected on the 3rd and 17th of February, 1862, respectively. Nearly all the Money-order offices of the United Kingdom are now also Post-office savings' banks. There are, in round numbers, 2,100 in England, Wales, and the Islands, 500 in Ireland,

and 400 in Scotland. Many of our largest towns have several banks. Thus there are at present five banks in Edinburgh, five in Glasgow, twelve in Dublin, ten in Liverpool, sixteen in Manchester, ten in Birmingham, and seven in Bristol. Of the entire number of Post-office banks, one hundred and sixty-one had, up to the date of the latest returns,<sup>1</sup> failed to obtain depositors. It should be stated, however, that this number is almost exclusively confined to small rural districts, and consists of banks which have not been long in operation. When we come to analyze the returns still further, we find abundant proof that the advantages offered by the Post-office banks are understood and appreciated in those parts of the United Kingdom where trade is most flourishing, and where the people are most given to habits of frugality. Thus, while Scotland has only 15 inoperative banks, and England only 46, no fewer than 100 banks in Ireland have failed to attract deposits. Up to March, 1864, the total number of depositors in the postal banks had been 461,505, of whom 403,560 resided in England, and 14,713 in Wales. Of the entire number, 372,955 still held accounts. At the same period, the total amount entrusted to the Post-office reached the sum of 5,955,774*l.* We are enabled to state that six months afterwards, viz. in September, 1864, the total amount had reached to 6,940,000*l.* the result of 2,130,000 deposits. Up to the same time, 2,452,000*l.* have been returned as repayments in 460,000 different sums. The total amount standing in September last to the credit of depositors was, therefore, 4,488,000*l.* The most gratifying facts in connexion with the new banks are—(1) that the greater part of the seven millions sterling received represents new business, being savings which the old banks failed to attract; and (2) that the Post-office banks show a much larger proportion of small depositors than those on the old system. This is proved by the facts, that the money remaining in the new banks, though only a tenth part of the sum deposited in the old ones, has been put there by a fifth of the number of depositors, and also that the average amount of one deposit is 3*l.* 5*s.* in the new, against 4*l.* 9*s.* in the old class of banks.

Between sixty and seventy old savings' banks closed their accounts during the years 1863-4, great part of the business of

<sup>1</sup> March, 1864. Return asked for by Mr. Baines, M.P. for Leeds.

each being transferred to the Post-office. A sum amounting to quite a million sterling has been regularly transferred from the old banks ; whilst additional sums, the amount of which cannot be correctly ascertained, have been withdrawn from the old, and paid into the postal banks in cash. In the twelve months ending March, 1864, the sum of 2,300*l.* was transferred, for some reason, from the new to the old banks.

With a view to facilitate the proceedings of the trustees of banks which have been or may hereafter be closed, an Act of Parliament was passed in the session of 1863, which will doubtless serve all the good purposes for which it was designed.

The *modus operandi* of this scheme is as simple as it is satisfactory. On making the first deposit under the new arrangements, an account-book is presented to the depositor, in which is entered his name, address, and occupation. All the necessary printed regulations are given in this book. The amount of each deposit is inserted by the postmaster, and an impression of the dated stamp of the Post-office is placed opposite the entry, thus making each transaction strictly official. At the close of each day's business, the postmaster must furnish to the Postmaster-General in London a full account of all the deposits that have been made in his office. By return of post an acknowledgment will be received by each depositor in the shape of a separate letter from the head office, the Postmaster-General becoming responsible for the amount. If such a letter does not arrive within ten days from the date of the deposit an inquiry is instituted, and the error rectified. An arrangement like the foregoing shows the boundless resources which the Government possesses in its Post-office. The acknowledgment of every separate transaction in each of the Money-order offices of the three kingdoms, which in any private undertaking would be an herculean labour, involving an enormous outlay in postage alone, is here accomplished with marvellous ease, and the whole mass of extra communications makes but an imperceptible ripple on the stream of the nation's letters flowing nightly from St. Martin's-le-Grand.

When a depositor wishes to withdraw any of his money, he has only to apply to the nearest post-office for the necessary printed form, and to fill it up, stating his name and address,

where his money is deposited, the amount he wishes to withdraw, and the place where he wishes it paid, and by return of post he will receive a warrant, in which the postmaster named is authorized to pay the amount applied for. In this respect Post-office savings' banks offer peculiar advantages. A depositor, for instance, visiting the metropolis, and having—as he may easily do in London—run short of ready money, may, with a little timely notice to the authorities in London, draw out, in any of the hundred new banks in the metropolis, from his amount at home sufficient for his needs. Another person, leaving one town for another, may, without any expense, and no more trouble than a simple notice, have his account transferred to his future home, and continue it there under precisely similar circumstances as those to which he has been accustomed. In 1863 this power was largely used, there being no fewer than 20,872 deposits and 15,842 withdrawals made under these circumstances, *e.g.* at places where the depositor is temporarily residing.<sup>1</sup> The facilities offered by the Post-office in this way are unique; no other banks can offer them; and such is the admirable system adopted by the Post-office, that complicated accounts of this nature are reduced to a matter of the simplest routine. At the end of each month the accounts of the two offices concerned in transactions of this kind are reconciled by the addition or deduction of the amounts in question, which arrangement (so far from being an irksome one), enables the Department to obtain a very valuable check upon its gross transactions. Under the old system, a depositor could only effect a transfer of his account from Manchester to Liverpool by withdrawing it from the one, under the usual long notice, and taking it to the other. This course was not only troublesome to the parties concerned, but the depositor ran the risk of losing his money, or, perhaps, of spending the whole or part of it. Under the Post-office system, however, the transfer may be effected in a day or two, without the depositor even seeing the money, and without the smallest risk of loss. Suppose a depositor wishes to transfer his account from a bank under

<sup>1</sup> One of the first deposits which was made on the first day of opening in the banks started on the new system was withdrawn the next week in another town at some distance. The depositor was a person travelling with a wild beast menagerie.—*Speech of Mr. Gladstone, January 5th, 1864.*

the old plan to one under the new, or *vice versa*, the matter is one of equally simple arrangement. He has only to apply to the old savings' bank for a certificate to enable him to transfer his deposits in that bank to that belonging to the Post-office, and when he obtains such certificate he may present it to any postmaster who transacts savings' bank business. The postmaster receives it as if it were so much money, and issues a depositor's book, treating the case as if the amount had been handed over to him. A few days longer are required before an acknowledgment can be sent from London ; but this is all the difference between the case and that of an ordinary savings' bank deposit.<sup>1</sup>

In the order of advantages which Post-office savings'-banks offer the depositor, we would rank next to their unquestionable security their peculiar convenience for deposit and withdrawal. Twelve months ago, a person might be the length of an English county distant from a bank for savings. Under the present arrangement, few persons will be a dozen miles distant from a Money-order office, whilst nine-tenths of the entire community will find the necessary accommodation at their very doors. As new centres of population are formed, or as hamlets rise into flourishing villages, and the want of an office for money-orders becomes felt, the requirement will continue to be met, with the

<sup>1</sup> Of course in this case inquiry would have to be made of the old bank and the National Debt office. Ordinarily, the receipt of letters on savings' bank business received in London, involving inquiry, is promptly acknowledged, the writers being told that the delay of a few days may occur before a reply can be sent. At the General Savings' Bank office in London, the transactions of each day are disposed of within that day; the monthly adjustment of accounts being also prompt. Warrants for withdrawals are issued in reply to every correct notice received up to eleven o'clock each morning, and these warrants are despatched by the same day's post to the depositors who have applied for them. Every letter received up to eleven o'clock A.M. is answered the same day, or at the latest next day, if no inquiry involving delay is necessary. The arrangements for the examination of savings' bank books every year are also very admirable. A few days before the anniversary of the first deposit, an official envelope is sent down from London to every depositor, in which he or she is asked to enclose his or her book so that it may arrive at the chief office at such a date. It makes its appearance again in the course of two or three days with the entries all checked, and the interest stated and allowed.—See an interesting paper by Mr. Scudamore, from which we have derived much of our information, read before the *Congrès International de Bienfaisance*, June 11th, 1862, and reprinted in the *Temple Bar Magazine*, under the title of "Safe Bind, Safe Find."

addition in each case of a companion savings' bank. Again, the expenses of management—amounting to a shilling in the old banks for each transaction, against something like half that amount in the new—will not allow of the ordinary banks being opened but at a few stated periods during the week. The Post-office savings' bank, attached as it is to the Post-office Money-order office, is open to the public full eight hours of every working day.

Sums not below one shilling, and amounts not exceeding thirty pounds, in any one year, may be deposited in these banks; depositors will not be put to any expense for books, postage, &c. and the rate of interest to be allowed will be  $2\frac{1}{2}$  per cent.—a sum which, though not large, is all which it is found the Government can pay without loss. It is not thought that this low rate of interest will deter the classes most sought after from investing in these banks. The poorer classes, as a rule, regard the question of a safe investment as a more important one than that of profits, and wisely think far more of their earnings being safe than of their receiving great returns for them.

This scheme, last and best of all, must help to foster independent habits among the working population. Their dealings with the Post-office banks are pure matters of business, and no obligation of any sort is either given or taken. The existing banks, on the other hand, partake largely of the nature of a charity. An objection frequently urged against savings' banks with much bitterness is, that many great employers of labour are on the directorate of such institutions, and that, consequently, they are able to exercise an oversight over their characters and savings, not always used for the best of purposes. In the Committee of Inquiry to which we have already alluded, cases—designated “rare,” we are glad to add—were adduced, from which it appeared that provident workmen's wages had been reduced by their employers, upon the ground of their being already well enough off. No such considerations, however, can affect the new banks: postmasters are forbidden to divulge the names of any depositor, or any of the amounts which he or she may have placed in their hands. The advantages of these banks are so obvious, and the arrangements under which they are worked are of such a simple nature, that they cannot help but be increasingly

used and useful ; while so safely and cheaply<sup>1</sup> are they managed, that it is impossible but that they will be in every respect a success, whether as regards the Government which originated them, or the community for whose benefit they are intended. Moreover, they are so handy and accessible at all times that the working man requires nothing but the *will* to do that which his daily experience tells him is so necessary should be done for the comfort of his family and home. Each month the work of the new banks is visibly increasing, and will continue to do so in proportion as their advantages and benefits become more widely known among the poorer classes. No truer service could be rendered on behalf of the temporal concerns of the great masses of our population than in spreading such information among them. Great employers of labour would find it a positive advantage to themselves to indoctrinate their workmen with the practice and pursuit of frugality, and in pointing them to this excellent machinery of operations ; masters might do the same with their domestic servants ; clergymen and ministers for their parishioners and congregations, with equal propriety and good effect. One effort to bring the postal banks prominently before the classes of which we now speak, in the wide circulation of a paper, *My Account with Her Majesty*,<sup>2</sup> cannot fail to be useful as it is evidently well meant. And surely the writer is not far from the mark when he concludes by saying : "If there's a philanthropist that's hard up for an object, I don't know that he could do better than go about distributing tracts setting forth the rules, regulations, and advantages of the Post-office savings' banks."

The Bill to grant additional facilities for the purchase of small Government annuities, and for the assuring payment of money at death, is likely to prove nearly as useful and beneficial to the classes for which it is mostly intended as even the institution of postal banks. Two such measures, initiated by the same Government within three years, are proofs that in holding out advantages and inducements to economy and frugality, our Legislature has the interests of the poorer classes at heart. The new Bill passed last session (1864) is in part an extension

<sup>1</sup> According to the return from which we have been quoting, there is a considerable surplus of assets over liabilities in the last year's working.

<sup>2</sup> Originally published in *All the Year Round*.

of the principle of 16 and 17 Vict. chap. 45, which Act provided for the granting of deferred Government annuities not exceeding 30*l.* per annum to persons paying either the purchase-money in one sum or annual premiums. Proposals for insuring lives on Government security are of still earlier origin. Mr. Whitbread, so early as 1807, proposed a Government assurance office. The Act passed in 1853 amended two previous Bills, so that a person buying an annuity could also insure the payment of a sum of money at death. The Act, however, with respect both to annuities and insurances, was practically inoperative, notwithstanding all the amendments it had undergone. Since 1834, the whole of the annual payments amounted to but 177,644*l.* In 1864, only 6,500 such annuities were in force, the amount which they represented standing at 140,000*l.* With the prospect of most efficient aid from those who had organized the postal banks, and every confidence in the improved machinery of the Post-office, Mr. Gladstone took the matter in hand, and reduced to a simple and efficacious plan all the proposals of the past. It is now matter of history that Mr. Gladstone's Bill, which at the outset and by the force of his great eloquence carried away all his hearers, was subsequently rather violently opposed, and sent to a Select Committee. It stood the test, however; for though peacefully altered in some of its minor details, it was very unanimously and cordially agreed to in its distinctive principles. These principles may be stated, in brief, to consist in a person now being able to insure his life for any sum from 20*l.* up to 100*l.* on Government security; that he may buy a deferred annuity of not more than 50*l.* either by one payment, or annual payments, or such small payments at such periods as may be most convenient, provided the sums be not less than two shillings; that the payments of premiums for insurance may also be made in the same manner; and, lastly, that a person can insure his life under the Act without any reference to the purchase of an annuity. Of the details of each measure much might be said, had space permitted. Suffice it to say, there are several clauses of a novel and attractive nature, which will secure for each branch, we venture to predict, all the business which their most sanguine advocates have been led to expect. The tables, which have been prepared with great care under the eye of the Commissioners for



the reduction of the National Debt, were laid before both Houses in the early part of the session (1865). The regulations for the conduct of the business have been prepared at the Post-office by the same able men who have carried out to such a successful issue the Act for the establishment of Post-office savings' banks.

To the tables and these regulations has just been added—in the shape of an official pamphlet, published by command of the Postmaster-General (Lord Stanley of Alderley), whose hearty co-operation in the important Post-office measures of the past four years deserves the highest praise—*Plain Rules for the Guidance of Persons desiring to Insure their Lives or to Purchase Government Annuities*.<sup>1</sup> This tract we hope will be circulated through the length and breadth of the land. It gives, in the plainest possible terms, very full and clear illustrations of the working of the Tables for both Insurances and Annuities, and no agent or *viva voce* instructor could better show, on the one hand, the benefits, either of a general or special or novel character, which are offered by the Government, or, on the other hand, the manner in which, and the facilities by means of which, the public may avail themselves of these benefits. At once, we understand, by the help of the machinery of the postal banks, operations will be commenced on a scheme which, in the words of one of its most powerful advocates, “will probably do more to encourage frugality in the poorest classes than any measure which has been adopted in England since the rights of private property became practically secure.”

<sup>1</sup> Written, we believe, by Mr. Scudamore, and published by Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1865.

## CONCLUSION.

No careful observer of our public institutions, and no one following us in the course of this history and description of one of the most important of these institutions, can doubt that the Post-office is keeping pace with the requirements of the age, or say that it is, as it used to be, intrenched in the traditions of the past. Different from some departments, with their undeviatingly narrow routine, the Post-office is managed with that enlightened policy which openly invites suggestion and criticism ; nay, it goes further, and offers rewards to persons, either in its employ or otherwise, who may devise any plan for accelerating its business. The work itself is of such a nature as to admit of constant improvement as well as constant expansion in the Post-office establishment. The authorities publicly intimate that they will be glad to receive clear and correct information respecting any faulty arrangements, promising that such information shall have the best attention of the practical officers of the department. At the same time, they take the opportunity to urge upon John Bull the practice of patience, reminding him of what he is often inclined to forget, that changes in machinery, so extensive and delicate, must be made carefully, and only after the most mature thought and fullest investigation. Mr. Matthew D. Hill, the respected Recorder of Birmingham, writing in *Fraser's Magazine* in 1862, said, what is no less true now than at that time, "The Post-office no longer assumes to be perfect, and its conductors have renounced their claims to infallibility. Suggested improvements, if they can sustain the indispensable test of rigid scrutiny, are welcomed, and not, as of old, frowned away. The department acts under the conviction that to thrive it must keep ahead of all rivals ; that it must discard the confidence heretofore placed in legal prohibitions, and seek its continuance of prosperity only by deserving it."

The Post-office, however, from its peculiar organization and the nature of its business, is liable to many misconceptions from

which the other great Government departments are more or less free. Hence arises many of the misunderstandings about it, and complaints against it, which, where they do not spring from trivialities incident to every such public undertaking, are in the main neither fair nor reasonable. In the officially published books of the Post-office, more especially the *British Postal Guide*, the reader may learn that there is a very evident desire on the part of the authorities to treat the public fairly, while, at the same time, many of the misunderstandings are recounted and explained, and many of the popular errors charged against the department are shown not to belong to it. Into these cases it is not our intention here to enter further than to say that though much trouble and many losses must from time to time and at all times have been caused by the carelessness or dishonesty of some of the many thousand officials of the Post-office, the cases are innumerable where it has been shown, even to the satisfaction of the complainant, that faults, originally set down to the Post-office, rested really in other quarters. We are sure that this view of the case is shared by the great majority of the people of this country, but seeing that there will always be some people found, who, rather than admire the habitual correctness of the great Post-office machine, prefer to dwell upon an occasional divergence, such exposures and elucidations as are continually given in the Post-office Reports may not be without their value. Bearing, for instance, on this point, an extract from the last *Report* of the Registration Commissioners for Scotland is most important, and speaks volumes : "Though transmission by post," say they, "has been so extensive for a number of years, not a single instance has occurred, throughout Scotland, of a deed intrusted to the Post-office for the purpose of transmission to the Registrar having been lost, or even delayed for an hour."

The opinion is frequently expressed in conversation, and we have often met with such expressions of opinion in our daily and weekly press, that the Post-office ought to give more accommodation to the public in many ways, and so disburse some, if not all, its enormous profits. These profits are said to be absurdly large ; that fifty per cent. is ten times the interest of money lent on decent security, and at least five times as much as would

satisfy sanguine private speculators. This subject of Post-office profits is, *de facto*, made the principal argument against what is called the Post-office monopoly. It is only amusing to note other arguments urged against the State monopoly of letter carrying. That the greatest advantages are derived, however, from the existing state of things, political economists are nearly all agreed. Blackstone has been referred to previously. The late Serjeant Stephen, in his *Commentaries*, endorses Blackstone's views. Adam Smith, in his *Wealth of Nations*, says that "the Post-office is perhaps the *only* mercantile project which has been successfully managed by every sort of Government." Mr. M'Cullagh, in his *Principles of Political Economy*, in language equally strong, says: "Perhaps, with the single exception of the carriage of letters, there is no branch of industry which Government had not better leave to be conducted by individuals. It does not appear, however, that the Post-office could be so well conducted by any other party as by Government."<sup>1</sup>

We have already, in other parts of this book, offered an opinion, in our humble way, on steps which might be taken towards affording extra facilities to the public. A cheaper sea service, a halfpenny post for our towns, a still cheaper registration system, and a small parcels' post, are some very important and desirable items, which it is hoped the practical men of the Post-office may ultimately think practicable. Nor would it be difficult, from published expressions of opinion on the part of the Lords of the Treasury, to make out an argument for universal free deliveries in this country. Some of these improved facilities may, indeed, be strongly urged. A halfpenny post for *local* letters—that is, for letters posted and delivered in the same town—seems to us not only practicable, but necessary. Before the days of penny postage we had penny posts in all the principal towns in the country; our towns, therefore, cannot be said to have received much benefit from the introduction of the great reform. A halfpenny post, we firmly believe, as in the city of Quebec, would be remunerative, although it might be necessary in the first instance to confine the experiment to the *larger* towns.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Fourth edition, 1849, pp. 296, 297. See also M'Cullagh's *Commercial Dictionary*, and the late Mr. Senior's *Political Economy*.

<sup>2</sup> The number of "local letters" posted at present is exceedingly large. According to the *Tenth Report*, 76 millions of letters were posted in London

Some such scheme will have to be considered, if it be only for the sake of the Post-office holding its own. It is well known that the corps of commissionaires in London offer a tariff for the delivery of cards and circular letters far below the ordinary postage rate. An important result might be supposed to follow. Such posts would 'in all probability necessitate more frequent deliveries of letters in provincial towns—the postmen to be paid accordingly, as fully, and not as now only partially, employed.<sup>2</sup>

The question of Post-office salaries naturally follows on the above remark. From the earliest times to the present, the Post-office official has never been burdened with too much pay; petitions on this subject have flowed into the Treasury incessantly, from the first establishment of the Post-office, and no department has laboured under the same incubus. Though regarding as of infinitely little value, and often untrustworthy and groundless, the wild talk of "grinding oppression," "slavish treatment," &c. with which the newspapers are now and then accustomed to regale their readers, all postal officials, from the highest to the lowest, who have their time *fully occupied* in the service, might have their remuneration almost doubled, with excellent effect to the service, and without making their position much superior to those of the officers in most of the other great departments of the State. Why, indeed, the revenue-making branches should be worse provided for than the establishments engaged in spending revenue seems anomalous, to say the least. While, therefore, no difficulty would be experienced in apportioning any of the surplus revenue that might be appropriated to any of the objects of which we have taken the liberty to speak, it is quite clear, nevertheless, that that revenue is a fair and not dishonour-

for delivery in London in 1863; 3,313,000 local letters were posted in Liverpool; 4,685,000 in Manchester; 3,357,000 in Birmingham; 1,800,000 in Leeds, &c. &c.

<sup>1</sup> Sir Morton Peto expresses an opinion in his work on *Taxation*, p. 113, that the Post-office has undertaken too much; that "the officers are required not so much for the collection of letters, as for the banking business, the despatch of money-orders, and the management of savings' banks." As a matter of fact, however, this extra work is scarcely perceptibly felt in the Post-office, and few officers could possibly be dispensed with if nothing but its normal business were left to the Post-office to accomplish. Practical experience of the working of any part of the operations would have kept him clear of the errors into which he has fallen. What the *great bulk* of the officers of the Post-office want is *more* work, not less.

able item on the credit side of the Government accounts, with which the public, except through their representatives in Parliament, have nothing whatever to do. The penny postage scheme was carried through Parliament in the confident expectation, resolutely urged by the intrepid founder of that scheme, that all the benefits promised under it would result to the country, without any great relinquishment of Post-office revenue, and that only for a term of years. Gradually, year by year, with enormous, nay, incalculable gain to the public convenience in innumerable ways, the revenue has risen beyond the highest standard of the past. Any relinquishment of the constantly increasing profits—which might now be made without prejudice to the grand scheme of penny postage—however desirable, depends upon Parliament, and not on the Post-office. It is urged, however, that the postal revenue staves off other taxes; “if the Post-office revenue be abandoned in whole, or in part,” said the Chancellor of the Exchequer on a recent occasion, “a gap will be created that will have to be supplied by direct taxation.” That our postage rates may be regarded as a kind of mild taxation, not unfairly levied, few will deny; that it is preferable to be taxed this way, so long as we must be taxed, few will doubt. But the argument scarcely relates so strongly to the *increments*, if we may so call them, of postal revenue, which will be added, it is only reasonable to suppose, from year to year. Remembering with all proper humility our own position, we would take the liberty to close with a suggestion which we leave to our legislators. Let one of these yearly increments,—which now average a quarter of a million of pounds,—go to the perfection and consolidation of the service, and we shall not be far wrong if we predict that the result of this trifling outlay would be a profitable return in the contentment it would engender, both within and without, for many years to come.



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